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ESSAYS.

ESSAYS

ON THE

FORMATION AND PUBLICATION

OF

OPINIONS,

THE PURSUIT OF TRUTH,

AND ON OTHER SUBJECTS.

760924

BY

SAMUEL BAILEY.

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PREFACE

TO THE FIRST EDITION.

It has been frequently objected to metaphysical speculations, that they subserve no useful purpose; and it must be allowed, that there are many inquiries in this department of intellectual exertion, which lead, in appearance, and even in reality, to no practical result. This is, however, a defect inherent in every pursuit, and can be brought as no specific objection against the philosophy of mind. How many substances are analyzed by the chemist, which can never be rendered useful; how many plants are minutely described by the naturalist, which might have remained in obscurity without the least possible detriment to the world; and how many events are narrated by the historian, from which no beneficial inference can be drawn! It seems to be a necessary condition of human science, that we should learn many useless things, in order to become acquainted with those which are of service; and as it is impossible, antecedently to experience, to know the value of our acquisitions, the only way in which mankind can secure all the advantages of knowledge is to prosecute their inquiries in every possible direction. There can be no greater impediment

to the progress of science than a perpetual and anxious reference at every step to palpable utility. Assured that the general result will be beneficial, it is not wise to be too solicitous as to the immediate value of every individual effort. Besides, there is a certain completeness to be attained in every science, for which we are obliged to acquire many particulars not otherwise of any worth. Nor is it to be forgotten, that trivial and apparently useless acquisitions are often the necessary preparatives to important discoveries. The labors of the antiquary, the verbal critic, the collator of mouldering manuscripts, the describer of microscopic objects (labors which may appear to many out of all proportion to the value of the result), may be preparing the way for the achievements of some splendid genius, who may combine their minute details into a magnificent system, or evolve from a multitude of particulars, collected with painful toil, some general principle destined to illuminate the career of future ages. To no one, perhaps, are the labors of his predecessors, even when they are apparently trifling or unsuccessful, of more service than to the metaphysician; and he who is well acquainted with the science can scarcely fail to perceive, that many of its inquiries are gradually converging to important results. Unallied as they may appear to present utility, it is not hazarding much to assert, that the world must hereafter be indebted to them for the extirpation of many mischievous errors, and the correction of a great part of those loose and illogical opinions by which society is now pervaded.

The principal Essays in the following work are attempts to throw the light of metaphysical investigation on subjects intimately connected with the affairs and the happiness of mankind. The importance of the topics discussed in the two Essays to which the volume owes its title will be acknowledged by all, and it will be perceived by the attentive inquirer, that the principles which the author has there attempted to establish lead to the most momentous conclusions, many of which he has contented himself with leaving to the sagacity of his readers. If any one will take the trouble of rigidly pursuing the main principle of the first Essay to all its consequences, he will find them of a magnitude and importance of which he was originally perhaps little aware.

In venturing upon these remarks, the author would not be conceived as making any undue claims to originality. Most of the principles, which he has advanced, have been repeatedly asserted, and have had an influence on mankind of which they themselves were probably unconscious. It often happens, that an important principle is vaguely apprehended, and incidentally expressed, long before it is reduced to a definite form or fixed by regular proof: but while it floats in this state on the surface of men's understandings it is only of casual and limited utility; it is sometimes forgotten and sometimes abandoned, seldom pursued to its consequences, and frequently denied in its modifications. It is only after it has been clearly established by an indisputable process of reasoning, explored in its bearings, and exhibited in all its force, that it becomes

of uniform and essential service; it is only then that it can be decisively appealed to both in controversy and in practice, and that it exerts the whole extent of its influence on private manners and public institutions.

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ESSAY

ON

THE FORMATION OF OPINIONS.

ESSAY I.

ON THE FORMATION OF OPINIONS.

SECTION I.

ON THE TERMS BELIEF, ASSENT, AND OPINION.

EVERY proposition presented to the mind, the terms of which are understood, necessarily occasions either belief, doubt, or disbelief. These are states or affections of the mind on which definition can throw no light, but which no one can be at a loss to understand; resembling, in this respect, all the other simple operations and emotions of which we are conscious. Although we cannot define or illustrate them, we may, nevertheless, enlarge or limit the application of the terms by which they are distinguished.

By some writers the term belief has been restricted to the state of the understanding in relation to propositions of a probable nature. Locke, for instance, makes a distinction between the perception of truth, in propositions which are certain, and the entertainment, as he expresses it, given by the mind to those which are only probable; styling the former knowledge, the latter belief, assent, or

opinion.* This distinction, however, is not sanctioned by the practice of the generality of metaphysicians, who constantly employ the term belief in reference to facts and propositions of all kinds. They speak of the belief, not only of our own identity, of the existence of an external world, and of the being of a God, but of the axioms and theorems of geometry. Nor does there appear to be any ground for the distinction when we appeal to our own consciousness. The nature of the affection is the same, whatever be the nature of the subject which has occasioned it. It is a state, indeed, which admits of various modifications; or, in other words, the belief of some things may be more firm and lively than of others. This strength and liveliness, however, do not at all depend on the logical nature of the propositions entertained. We believe as firmly, that there was a sanguinary contest between the English and French on the field of Waterloo, as that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles, although the one would be ranked by logicians amongst probable, and the other amongst certain propositions.

There are two other terms sometimes employed as synonymous with belief, *viz.* assent and opinion, but all the three have their respective shades of meaning. Assent appears to denote the state of the understanding in relation only to propositions; while belief has a more comprehensive acceptation, expressing the state of the

* 'Probability is likeness to be true, the very notation of the word signifying such a proposition, for which there be arguments or proofs, to make it pass or be received for true. The entertainment the mind gives this sort of propositions is called belief, assent, or opinion, which is the admitting or receiving any proposition for true, upon arguments, or proofs, that are found to persuade us to receive it as true, without certain knowledge that it is so.'— *Essay on the Understanding*, book iv., chapter 15.

mind in relation to any fact or circumstance, although that fact or circumstance may never have occurred to it in the form of a proposition, or, what is the same thing, may never have been reduced by it into words. Every body believes in his own identity, and in the existence of an external world, although comparatively few have thought of these truths in express terms. It would, therefore, be more proper to speak of a man's belief in his identity than of his assent to his identity; of his belief in the existence of matter than of his assent to it; but we might with perfect propriety speak of his assent to the proposition that matter exists.

The term opinion is used by Locke, in some passages of his Essay, as synonymous with belief and assent, but there is a wide difference in its general acceptation. It is seldom, if ever, used in reference to subjects which are certain or demonstrable. We talk of a person's opinion in religion or politics, but not in algebra or geometry, and so far the last named philosopher and common usage are in accordance; but he appears to have sometimes forgotten that the term, in its ordinary sense, denotes not the state of the mind, but the subject of belief, the thing or the proposition believed. Thus we say to receive, to hold, and to renounce an opinion.

The distinctions here pointed out are not, however, very closely observed. On the contrary, it is surprising that words of so much importance should be employed with so little precision. Belief is often indiscriminately used to express a state or affection of the understanding, a proposition believed, a doctrine, and a collection of doctrines. In the following pages it will simply denote the state or affection of the mind, while the term opinion will be employed (in reference to propositions of a probable nature) to designate that which is believed.

It may be remarked, that whatever we believe may be thrown into the form of a proposition; and when we say of such a proposition that we believe it, it is equivalent to saying that it appears to us to be true. The expressions are exactly synonymous, or convertible; for it would be a manifest contradiction to assert that we believed a proposition which did not appear true to us, or that a proposition appeared true which we did not believe.

SECTION II.

ON THE INDEPENDENCE OF BELIEF ON THE WILL.

It has been frequently asserted, and still more frequently assumed, that belief is, in many cases, a voluntary act of the mind. In what cases, however, it is dependent on the will, few writers have ventured to state in direct terms; nor do I know that the subject has ever been examined with that closeness of attention which its importance deserves. If it were a point of mere speculative curiosity, it would scarcely be worth while to rescue it from the vagueness in which it has hitherto remained; but the fact is, that many of the actions, as well as many of the moral judgments of mankind, proceed on an assumption of the voluntary nature of belief, and it therefore becomes of practical moment to ascertain how far that assumption is founded in truth. Of the justness of this remark we shall have occasion in the sequel to adduce ample proof.

It may be observed, in the first place, that there are a great number of facts and propositions, in regard to our belief, of which it is universally allowed that the will can have no power, and motives no efficacy. A mathematical axiom, for instance, cannot be doubted by any man who comprehends the terms in which it is expressed, however ardent may be his desire to disbelieve it. Threats and torments would be in vain employed to compel a geometrician to dissent from a proposition in Euclid. He might be compelled to assert the falsity of the proposition, but all the powers in the universe could not make him believe what he thus asserted. In the same way, no hopes nor

fears, no menaces, no allurements, could at all affect a man's belief in a matter of fact which happened under his own observation. The remark is also true of innumerable facts which we have received on the testimony of others. That there have been such men as Cæsar and Cicero, Pope and Newton, and that there are at present such cities as Paris and Vienna, it is impossible to disbelieve by any effort of the will.

In those cases, therefore, where the evidence is of such a nature as to produce universal assent, it is acknowledged by all that the will can have no power over our convictions. If it exercises any control at all, we must look for it in those subjects which admit of diversity of opinion. But the belief, doubt, or disbelief which a man entertains of any proposition, which others regard with different sentiments, may be the same in strength and every other respect as the belief, doubt, or disbelief which he entertains of a proposition in regard to which there is entire unanimity; and if in the latter case his opinion is involuntary, there can be no reason to suppose it otherwise in the former. The mere circumstance of others taking a different view of the subject (of which he may be altogether unaware) can have no tendency to render his belief more liable to be affected by motives, or, in other words, to bring it under the control of the will.

It will, perhaps, be generally granted, that decided belief, or decided disbelief, when once engendered in the mind, cannot be affected by volition. This influence is usually placed in the middle region of suspense and doubt, and it is supposed, that when the understanding is in a state of fluctuation between two opinions, it is in the power of the will to determine the decision. The state of doubt, however, will be found to be no more subject to the will than any other state of the intellect. All the

various degrees of belief and disbelief, from the fullest conviction to doubt, and from doubt to absolute incredulity, correspond to the degree of evidence, or to the nature of the considerations present to the mind. To be in doubt is to want that degree or kind of evidence which produces belief; and while the evidence remains the same, without addition or diminution, the mind must continue in doubt.* The understanding, it is clear, cannot believe a proposition on precisely the same evidence as that on which it previously doubted it, and yet to ascribe to mere volition a change from doubt to conviction is asserting that this may take place; it is affirming that a man, without the slightest reason, may, if he please, believe to-day what he doubted yesterday.

It may be alleged, perhaps, that it is not necessary to suppose the understanding to believe a proposition on the same evidence as that on which it previously doubted it, since the will may have the power of changing the character of the evidence. This implies that it may be capable either of raising additional ideas in the mind, or of detaching some of the ideas already there from the rest with which they are associated, and dismissing them from view. But it is acknowledged by our best metaphysical

* Belief appears to be the firmest when there are no hostile or contrary considerations for the mind to rest upon. In proportion to the number and importance of contrary considerations belief is impaired, and if they are increased to a certain extent, it fades into doubt. The latter is often a state of oscillation, in which the mind passes from one class of arguments to another, the predominant affection of the moment according with the arguments on which the contemplation happens to be fixed. The mind may also be said to be in doubt when it is acquainted with neither side of a question, and has therefore no grounds for a determinate opinion. The one may be called active or positive, the other passive or negative doubt.

writers,* that by mere volition we cannot call up any idea, nor, therefore, any number of ideas forming an argument; such an operation necessarily implying the actual presence of the ideas before the will is exerted: it is also impossible for us to choose what ideas shall be introduced into the mind by any topic on which we bestow our attention; and it is manifest, that when ideas have been once joined together, we cannot prevent them from suggesting each other according to the regular laws of association. In the examination of any subject, therefore, certain ideas will arise in our minds independently of the will, and, as long as we fix our attention on that subject, we cannot avoid the consequent suggestions, nor single out any part and forget the rest. We may, it is true, by the help of external means, or even by an internal effort, dismiss a subject entirely from our thoughts; we may get rid of it by turning our attention to something else; but while we continue to reflect upon it, we cannot prevent it from suggesting those ideas, which, from the habits, character, and constitution of our minds, it is calculated to excite.

We come then to the conclusion, that since the same considerations present to the mind must invariably produce the same belief, doubt, or disbelief, and since volition can neither introduce any additional considerations, nor dismiss what are already present, the will can have no influence on belief; or, in other words, belief, doubt, and disbelief, are involuntary states of the intellect.

But the proof of the involuntary nature of belief depends not on the justness of any metaphysical argument. Every one may bring the question to the test of experiment; he may appeal to his own consciousness, and try

* See Lord Kames's Elements of Criticism, and Dugald Stewart's Philosophy of the Human Mind.

whether, in any conceivable case, he can at pleasure change his opinion, and he will soon become sensible of the inefficacy of the attempt.* Take any controverted fact in history; let a man make himself perfectly acquainted with the statements and authorities on both sides, and, at the end of his investigation, he will either believe, doubt, or disbelieve the fact in question. Now apply any possible motive to his mind. Blame him, praise him, intimidate him by threats, or allure him by promises, and after all your efforts, how far will you have succeeded in changing the state of his intellect in relation to the fact? How far will you have altered the connection which he discerns between certain premises and certain conclusions? To affect his belief you must affect the subject of it by producing new arguments or considerations. The understanding being passive as to the impressions made upon it, if you wish to change those impressions you must change the cause which produces them. You can alter perceptions only by altering the thing perceived. Every man's consciousness will tell him, that the will can no more modify the effect of an argument on the understanding, than it can change the taste of sugar to the palate, or the fragrance of a rose to the smell; and that nothing can weaken its force, as apprehended by the intellect, but another argument opposed to it.

* See Note A.

SECTION III.

ON THE OPINIONS OF LOCKE AND SOME OTHER WRITERS ON THIS SUBJECT.

THE view which we have just taken, of the involuntary nature of belief, coincides with that which Locke has presented to us in the following passage, as well as in other parts of his Essay.

'As knowledge,' says he, 'is no more arbitrary than perception; so I think assent is no more in our power than knowledge. When the agreement of any two ideas appears to our minds, whether immediately or by the assistance of reason, I can no more refuse to perceive, no more avoid knowing it, than I can avoid seeing those objects which I turn my eyes to, and look on in daylight: and what upon full examination I find the most probable, I cannot deny my assent to. But though we cannot hinder our knowledge, where the agreement is once perceived, nor our assent, where the probability manifestly appears upon due consideration of all the measures of it; yet we can hinder both knowledge and assent, by stopping our inquiry, and not employing our faculties in the search of any truth.'*

It is not to be concealed, however, that this powerful reasoner frequently makes use of language implying belief to be an affair of the will, although there is only one case which he specifically points out as an exception to the general remark in the preceding extract.

'I think,' says he, 'we may conclude, that in proposi-

* Essay on the Understanding, book iv., chapter 20.

tions, where though the proofs in view are of most moment, yet there are sufficient grounds to suspect that there is either fallacy in words, or certain proofs as considerable to be produced on the contrary side; there assent, suspense, or dissent, are often voluntary actions.' *

Here he has evidently mistaken the effect of an argument on the understanding for an act of the will. To have 'sufficient grounds to suspect either fallacy in words, or certain proofs as considerable to be produced on the contrary side,' is to be already in doubt, or in the state called suspense; and consequently our suspense cannot be occasioned by subsequent volition, much less can it be converted by the will into assent or dissent.

Locke has in fact asserted, first, that the mind may be in doubt from a consideration presented to the understanding, and then, that in consequence of this doubt it may voluntarily suspend its opinion; or, in other words, voluntarily doubt what it before doubted involuntarily.

The case adduced is analogous to that of a surveyor, who in taking the dimensions of a piece of timber should be led to suspect the correctness of the instrument which he employed. The suspicion would be manifestly involuntary, and could be removed only by a proof of its being unfounded. That in the instance alleged by Locke, or in any instance, assent, suspense, and dissent are voluntary actions, is moreover inconsistent with his former admission, that assent must follow or be determined by the greater manifest probability. For, if a greater apparent probability unavoidably produces assent, a smaller apparent probability opposed to it must produce dissent; and two equal probabilities poised against each other (which is the only remaining case that can possibly occur) must

* Essay on the Understanding, book iv., chapter 20.

either produce uncertainty, or one of them must produce the same effect as a greater probability, and the other the same effect as a smaller probability. Thus two opposite and unequal effects would be made to result from two equal causes. And if to believe a proposition is the same thing as for that proposition to appear to the mind more probable than its opposite, then to say that a man may believe if he choose one of two equally probable propositions, and disbelieve the other, is to say, that by an act of the will two propositions may appear equally and unequally probable at the same time.

In the writings of another celebrated philosopher, Dr. Reid, we find the doctrine, that belief is independent of the will, stated without any such exception as that which has been the subject of the preceding animadversions.

'It is not in our power,' says this acute writer, 'to judge as we will. The judgment is carried along necessarily by the evidence, real or seeming, which appears to us at the time. But in propositions that are submitted to our judgment there is this great difference; some are of such a nature that a man of ripe understanding may apprehend them distinctly, and perfectly understand their meaning without finding himself under any necessity of believing them to be true or false, probable or improbable. The judgment remains in suspense, until it is inclined on one side or another by reasons or arguments.'*

That Dr. Reid did not ascribe this suspense of the judgment to any exertion of the will is sufficiently evident from the manner in which he expresses himself. It is scarcely necessary to adduce the following passage by way of corroboration, but it is too explicit and too much in point not to be presented to the reader.

* Essays on the Intellectual Powers, page 545, 4to. edition.

'Every degree of evidence, perceived by the mind, produces a proportioned degree of assent or belief. The judgment may be in perfect suspense between two contradictory opinions, when there is no evidence for either, or equal evidence for both. The least preponderancy on one side inclines the judgment in proportion. Belief is mixed with doubt, more or less, until we come to the highest degree of evidence, when all doubt vanishes, and the belief is firm and immovable. This degree of evidence, the highest the human faculties can attain, we call certainty.' *

Lord Bacon, in several parts of his writings, appears to have entertained similar views on this subject, although, as he never made it a matter of separate consideration, and only incidentally mentions it, his language cannot be expected to be uniformly consistent. In one remarkable passage he directly asserts the independence of belief on thewill, and distinctly points out the only way in which it can be controlled.

'The commandment of knowledge,' says he 'is yet higher than the commandment over the will; for it is a commandment over the reason, belief, and understanding of man, which is the highest part of the mind, and giveth law to the will itself; for there is no power on earth, which setteth up a throne, or chair of state, in the spirits and souls of men, and in their cogitations, imaginations, opinions, and beliefs, but knowledge and learning.' †

* Essays on the Intellectual Powers, p. 691, 4to. edition.

† Of the Proficience and Advancement of Learning, book i.

SECTION IV.

ON THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH HAVE LED MEN TO REGARD BELIEF AS VOLUNTARY.

It is natural to inquire, why the affection or state of mind, which we term belief, should be considered as depending on the will any more than other affections or states of mind; why the discernment of truth and error should be considered as voluntary, and the discernment of other qualities as involuntary. We cannot alter at pleasure the appearances of objects, nor the sentiments which they occasion. If we open our eyes we must see things as they are, and receive the impressions which they are fitted to produce. Fields will appear barren or fertile, hills low or lofty, rivers wide or narrow, men and women handsome or ugly, pleasant or disagreeable. If we take up a book its language will appear to us refined or vulgar, its figures apt or inappropriate, its images beautiful or inelegant, its matter well or ill arranged, its narrative pathetic, or lively, or uninteresting; and we think not of ascribing these impressions to the will; why then, when we go a step farther, and find its arguments convincing, or doubtful, or inconclusive, should that be considered as a voluntary act?

The common error, of regarding belief as dependent on volition, may perhaps be mainly ascribed to the intimate connection subsisting between belief and the expression or declaration of it, the latter of which is at all times an act of the will. So close is this connection, and so frequently do they coincide, that this same language is often applicable to both. It is not, therefore, surprising that they

have been confounded together, and even received one common appellation, for the term assent is used to express the intimation of our concurrence with an opinion as well as the concurrence itself, our ostensible as well as our real belief. By this intimate connection and frequent coincidence, men have been inadvertently led to attribute the properties belonging to an external sign to the state or affection of the mind, and have drawn their inferences as if the two things were exactly identical. As we can refuse to express our agreement with a proposition, so, it has been assumed, we can refuse to believe it; and as motives have power to induce a man to declare his assent, so it has been taken for granted they have the power of inducing him to yield his credence.

Our best writers and acutest metaphysicians speak of yielding or withholding our belief, granting or refusing our assent, all which are evidently phrases transferred from the external profession to the internal act. They can be regarded with propriety only as figurative expressions; and if they are defensible, on the ground of the necessity of explaining the phenomena of the mind by a reference to physical events, their figurative character should never be overlooked.

It is trite to remark, that, in treating of the mental powers, it is but too common to found conclusions on the literal interpretation of metaphorical phrases, as if the operations of the mind corresponded exactly with those physical operations which supplied the language used in describing them.

We cannot keep too steadily in view the distinction here pointed out, between the state of the understanding and the outward declaration, between internal and external assent. To the neglect of it may be traced almost all the vagueness, sophistry, and inconsistency on the sub-

ject of belief, which abound, as well in the writings of moralists and metaphysicians, as in the opinions, practices, and institutions of society. We ought always to bear in mind, that what a man affirms may be totally at variance with what he believes: and that whatever power we may exert over his professions by allurements or intimidation, by the application of pleasure or of pain, his internal conviction can be reached by nothing but considerations addressed to his intellect.

Another source of error on this subject has probably been the practice of confounding the consent of the understanding with that of the will or the feelings. The term assent is often applied indiscriminately to both, and doubtless this confusion has sometimes suggested wrong inferences. Dr. Johnson has furnished an instance of the ease with which these two very different things may be confounded by their common right to the same term. He defines assent to be 'the act of agreeing to any thing,' and supports his interpretation by the following examples: —

'Without the King's *assent* or knowledge
You wrought to be a legate.'

SHAKSPEARE, *Henry VIII.*

'All the arguments on both sides must be laid in balance, and upon the whole, the understanding determine its *assent*.'

LOCKE.

In the first of these examples, the term is evidently used, not to express opinion or belief, but the consent or concurrence of the will; in the second it implies the consent of the understanding. The expression, 'act of agreeing,' may be employed indifferently for either; but agreeing to a measure or a proposal is obviously a very different thing from agreeing with an argument or a proposition.

In attempting to account for the error of regarding belief as voluntary, it is important to remark, that it may have arisen, in some degree, from the circumstance of many people having no real conception of the truth or falsehood of those opinions which they profess. They adopt an opinion according to their interest or their passions; or, in other words, they undertake to assert some particular doctrine, and regard as adversaries all who oppose it. Without any reference to its import, they look upon it as a thing to be maintained, a post to be defended. In this sense, and with such people, opinions may be said to be voluntary, and being mere professions, forming a sort of party badge, and having no dependence on the understanding, they may be assumed and discarded at pleasure.

It may perhaps be asserted with truth, that in regard to some subjects or other, all mankind are in this predicament; and opinions thus taken up are often maintained with more violence than such as are founded on the most thorough conviction. They are maintained, not for the sake of truth, nor from the desire natural to man of impressing upon others what he sincerely believes, but for the support of that interest, or the gratification of that passion, on account of which they were originally adopted. By thus defending opinions of which they have no clear conviction, people often succeed in imposing on themselves as well as on others. Paradoxical as it may seem, it is nevertheless true, that they are not always aware of the exact state of their own minds: they frequently imagine themselves to believe more than they are actually convinced of. On many questions they are not able to form any definite decision, and yet, from the necessity of professing some opinion, or joining some party, and from the habit of making assertions, and even arguing in favor of what they are thus pledged

to support, they come to regard themselves as entertaining positive sentiments on points about which they are really in doubt.

To solve this apparent paradox it is necessary to reflect, that as it is impossible for us to have all the considerations on which our opinions are founded at once and all subjects present to the mind, our opinions are on most occasions simply objects of memory, results at which we recollect to have arrived without at the moment recollecting the process. In this way we believe propositions on the strength of our recollection, and perhaps the considerations on which they are founded present themselves only on occasions when it is necessary, for our own satisfaction or for the conviction of others, to retrace or restate them. Hence it is obviously possible for even an acute logician to be mistaken as to the opinions about which he has attained a decisive conviction, and not to find out this mistake till he is reduced to the necessity of recollecting, or rather repeating, the process through which he had originally gone. When he is thus driven back on the merits of the question, he finds and feels himself doubtful as to points on which he imagined his mind to have been previously satisfied. If men, who are capable of estimating evidence, of pursuing a train of argument, and of reflecting on the operations of their own minds, are sometimes liable to this kind of deception, we need not wonder to find it common amongst such as have scarcely any definite notions, or any power of self-introspection.

To return to the remark which led to this digression, it may be observed, that the practice of adopting and maintaining opinions without any actual conviction, must necessarily give them the appearance of depending on the will, and what is true of mere professions is naturally and easily transferred to opinions which have really possession of the understanding.

SECTION V.

ON THE SOURCES OF DIFFERENCES OF OPINION.

Although belief is an involuntary state of the mind, yet, like many other involuntary affections and events, it may, in some circumstances, be partially controlled by our voluntary actions. Sleep is involuntary, but it may, to a certain extent, be prevented or induced according to our pleasure; and in a similar manner, although we have no power to believe or disbelieve as we choose, yet there are cases in which we may imperfectly modify our belief, by subjecting our minds to the operation of such evidence as promises to gratify our inclination in its result. We may, at any time, be unfair and partial in the examination of a question. We may turn our attention from the arguments on one side, and direct all its keenness to those on the other; and notwithstanding some latent suspicions of a contrary nature, springing from the consciousness of a want of candor, we may possibly by such means lessen our doubts about an opinion which we desire to think true.

If we had already a clear and full conviction of the truth of any doctrine, perhaps no partiality of attention in favor of the opposite side could effect an alteration in our opinion; but in all cases where our views were vague, or our minds uniformed, an exclusive devotion to one side of the evidence might have a material influence on our conclusions. In such cases, a man has in some degree the power of making his opinions follow in the track of his inclinations.

Let us suppose the case of one, who perceived that it

would be greatly to his interest to hold a certain doctrine, on which he had hitherto bestowed only a vague consideration. Unless he had more than common magnanimity, he would naturally endeavor to free himself from any doubts which might be floating in his mind. He would, therefore, make himself acquainted with all the arguments which had been urged on that side of the question to which his inclinations were directed, and shun all of a contrary nature, and by such a system of exclusion he might be successful in his object. Even in this case, however, considerations might present themselves to his mind which would counteract all his efforts, and force upon him the very conviction he was endeavoring to avoid. Though he might choose what written or oral arguments should operate on his understanding, he could have no power over the result; he would have no control over the intellectual machinery which those arguments might set in motion in his own mind.

This wilful partiality of attention or examination is the only way in which our opinions can be purposely affected by our actions, or in which we can exercise any control over the formation of our opinions; and its effects are obviously very circumscribed and uncertain. By a cursory glance at those sources of diversity of opinion which have no dependence on the will, it will be seen that they are perfectly sufficient to account for most of the differences which exist; and that an intentional partiality in our investigations can have but a slender influence amidst the operation of causes so much more powerful.

The external circumstances in which men are placed, as they vary in the case of every individual, must necessarily occasion different ideas to be presented to each mind, different associations to be established even amongst the same ideas, and of course different opinions to be

formed. It may be truly said, indeed, that in no instance have the ideas presented to two individuals, throughout the course of their lives, collectively agreed or corresponded precisely in their order and connection. Amongst the external circumstances here alluded to, perhaps the most striking are those which we see operating on whole nations. In general, the casualty of being brought into the world in a particular country inevitably determines the greater part of a man's opinions; and of the rest, there are few which do not owe their origin to the rank and family in which he happens to be born, and to the characters of the other human beings by whom he is surrounded. Even the extraordinary views, which open to the man of original genius, are often the result of various ideas suggested by his peculiar situation, and presented to his conception in a particular order and concomitance.

A great portion of the opinions of mankind are notoriously propagated by transmission from one generation to another, without any possible option on the part of those into whose minds they are instilled. A child regards as true whatever his teachers choose to inculcate, and whatever he discovers to be believed by those around him. His creed is thus insensibly formed, and he will continue in after-life to believe the same things, without any proof, provided his knowledge and experience do not happen to impinge on their falsehood. Mere instillation is sufficient to make him believe any proposition, although he should be utterly ignorant of the foundation on which it rests, or the evidence by which it is supported. It may create in his mind a belief of the most palpable absurdities; things, as it appears to others, not only contradicted by his reason, but at variance with the testimony of his senses; and in the boundless field, which the senses do not reach, there is nothing too preposterous to be palmed on his

credulity. The religious opinions of the majority of mankind are necessarily acquired in this way: from the nature of the case, they cannot be otherwise than derivative, and they are as firmly believed, without the least particle of evidence, as the theorems of Euclid by those who understand the demonstrations. Men do not suspect their religious creed to be false, because the grounds of its truth or its falsity lie altogether without the pale of their knowledge, and remote from the path of their experience, and because, when they have been accustomed to connect certain ideas together in their infancy, it grows beyond the power of their imagination to disjoin them. Nor is it merely definite opinions which are acquired in this manner, but a thousand associations are established in the mind, which influence their judgments in matters with which they subsequently become conversant.

Thus the external circumstances in which men are placed unavoidably occasion, without any choice on their part, the chief diversities of opinion existing in the world. National circumstances occasion national, and individual circumstances individual peculiarities of thinking. On this point, indeed, there can be no dispute. The most strenuous advocates (if such there are) for the power of the will over belief, will not deny the influence of the causes adduced: they will readily acknowledge that it is impossible for all men to think alike, when their circumstances are so essentially dissimilar. The principal question to consider, and that which bears more peculiarly on the design of the present essay, is not why so many various opinions are prevalent in the world, but how, if belief is perfectly independent of the will, shall we account for the fact, that the same events or the same arguments produce different effects on different minds, or, in other words, give rise to different opinions.

This fact, which is a matter of common observation, may at first sight appear to be inconsistent with the position maintained in a former chapter, that the same considerations present to the mind will invariably produce the same opinion. The inconsistency, however, will vanish when we reflect, that in the one case are meant only the external or ostensible arguments, the considerations expressed in language and submitted to the senses; but, in the other case, the whole combination of ideas in view of the understanding. Were language so perfect, that the same words would convey precisely the same ideas to every individual, and could the understanding be strictly limited to the ideas alone conveyed by the words employed, then the arguments submitted to our eyes or ears, and the considerations present to the mind, would exactly coincide, and there could be no difference of opinion respecting any proposition whatever.

This remark indicates the sources whence different conclusions from the same arguments must arise. They must originate either in that defect of language, in consequence of which the terms employed do not convey to every mind the same ideas, or in those circumstances which occasion other ideas, besides those actually expressed (and different ideas in the case of different individuals), to present themselves to the understanding: to which we may add such circumstances as, when the original arguments or consequent suggestions are numerous and complicated, have a tendency to fix the attention of different persons on different parts, and thereby occasion different considerations to remain ultimately in view.

That the terms employed, in many subjects, do not convey the same ideas to every understanding, is a defect in language, as an instrument of communication, which has often been explained and lamented. Since language is

conventional, involving an arbitrary connection between ideas and sounds, all men have to learn as well as they can to affix the same notions to the same signs. In regard to complex ideas this cannot always be accomplished, and hence a term may stand for one thing in the mind of one person, and for a different thing in the mind of another. When such terms, therefore, are used in any proposition, it is not surprising that various opinions are entertained of its verisimilitude. This is so obvious a source of diversity of opinion, that it requires no farther exposition. We may, therefore, proceed to the consideration of the other circumstances which occasion different conclusions from the same arguments.

If we examine the procedure of the understanding, when it is considering any train of argument offered to it, we shall find that almost every idea, at least every proposition in the train, awakens other ideas and propositions; and the ultimate impression left on the mind is the joint result of both. It is not only what a book expresses, but what it suggests, which determines its effect on the reader; and, consequently, whatever occasions the same arguments to suggest different considerations or combinations of thought to different minds may be ranked amongst those sources of discrepancies in opinion which we are investigating.

One circumstance, which must have a powerful effect in determining the character of these suggestions, is the natural constitution of the mind. The endless variety of original talent, and degrees of intellectual power, to be found amongst men, implies as endless a variety in the modes in which their ideas are associated and suggested. Hence, a diversity of judgment will inevitably ensue. Or, if we choose to vary the phraseology, we may say that the powers of conception and discrimination in different

persons are unequal, and since their intellectual vision extends not to the same depth and distance, their views cannot be alike. Whatever language we employ on this subject, it is sufficiently manifest, that the natural disparity in the understandings of mankind must be a cause of diversity in the trains of thought which any occasion may suggest, and must thus beget contrarieties of judgment.

A still more powerful circumstance tending to modify the combinations of thought, suggested by any set of arguments, is the nature of the ideas, associations, prejudices, and opinions, already in the mind. The train of ideas and considerations, which rises at the contemplation of an object, may not, as a whole, resemble any antecedent train, but its various parts must evidently be composed of ideas preconceived and familiar. Hence the diversities of opinion which the external circumstances of mankind have created, the peculiarities of thinking in sects and nations, the intellectual habits of professions, and the local prejudices of individuals, may all become causes of various conclusions from the same arguments. To feel the full force of this remark we have only to consider, what different ideas would crowd upon the mind of a whig and a tory during the perusal of the same political essay; or how totally dissimilar would be the train of thought, awakened by the same theological treatise, in the understanding of an Italian monk and an English dissenter. Of all the circumstances, which determine the various judgments of mankind on any particular subject, perhaps that which we have just noticed is not only of the greatest force, but of the greatest importance, since it has the principal share in moulding their opinions in moral, theological, and political science. It is, however, so completely obvious as to supersede the

necessity of any farther endeavor to illustrate it; and we shall, therefore, proceed in the next section to the consideration of a not less interesting source of diversity of judgment, to be found in the influence possessed by the sensitive over the intellectual part of our nature.*

* It may probably appear, that in this section we are resolving all reasoning into association, which has been termed (with what justice we cannot stop to examine) a mere verbal generalization. In reality, however, we are only proceeding on the indisputable fact, that in the examination of any subject, certain ideas and propositions do come into the mind. There must be some cause or causes why every one of these presents itself; the will is evidently not one of these causes, for reasons before assigned; and we are endeavoring to point out what they are, or at least such of them as vary in different individuals.

SECTION VI.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED. SOURCES OF DIFFERENCES OF OPINION IN THE FEELINGS AND PASSIONS OF MANKIND.

In entering upon the subject of the present section it may be well to repeat the remark, that the causes of the various conclusions which men draw from the same arguments, are to be sought for in the imperfections of language, in the circumstances which regulate our trains of thought, and in whatever tends to excite or fix the attention in a partial manner. It is in the power of producing the two latter effects, that the peculiar influence possessed by the sensitive over the intellectual part of our nature seems to consist. There is no remark more frequent, no maxim more current in the world, than that a man's opinions are influenced by his interest and passions.* This is so manifest that we can often predict, from a knowledge of his situation and relations in society, what sentiments, on a given subject, he will profess and maintain. Much of the influence thus apparently exerted by passion on the opinions of mankind, extends however, in reality, only to their professions. Many doctrines, as we have already remarked, are adopted without any real conviction; they are merely ostensible assumptions, not indications of the actual state of the understanding; and what a man thus professes may be expected, of course, to

* 'Intellectus humanus,' says Lord Bacon, 'luminis sicci non est; sed recipit infusionem a voluntate et affectibus.'—*Novum Organum*, lib. i.

accord with his interest or passions. But laying all these out of the question, there is indisputably an influence exerted by emotions and passions over the understanding itself. They have sometimes the effect of making that argument appear valid to one man, which is regarded as inconclusive by another; in a word, of begetting various opinions on the same subject.

This effect is partly to be accounted for, as before stated, by their power of awakening peculiar trains of ideas. The same words, or the same objects, will rouse combinations of thought in the mind when it is laboring under melancholy, of a totally different character from those which they suggest during a state of cheerfulness; and, in a similar manner, all the various emotions and passions by which we are affected, occasionally operate as principles of suggestion. If, therefore, the effect of any arguments on the understanding depends both on the arguments themselves and the ideas and considerations which they suggest, the various effects of the same arguments, on such as attend to them, may be partly ascribed to the states of feeling in which such persons happen to be.

The other way in which the passions and emotions of men influence their opinions, and cause them to receive different impressions from the same arguments, may deserve a fuller elucidation. When those arguments form a train or series of considerable length and complexity, it is obviously impossible that they should all be present to the mind together, or at the same moment. The understanding must survey them in detail; and its ultimate decision will depend on those which have chiefly excited its attention, and remain in view at the close of the scrutiny. Whatever, therefore, occasions any of the arguments to come before the mind more frequently,

and remain in view more permanently, than the rest; or, in other words, whatever fixes the attention on some more than others, will naturally affect its decision. The remark applies not only to the arguments actually submitted to us, but also to all the ideas and considerations which they suggest.

This attribute, of drawing and fixing the attention, belongs in a remarkable degree to all strong emotions. Every one must have felt, while he has been affected by any particular passion, that he could scarcely attend to any thing but what had some connection with it; he must have experienced its power of presenting exclusive and strong views, its despotism in banishing all but its own ideas. Fear, for example, may so concentrate our thoughts on some particular features of our situation, may so absorb our attention, that we may overlook all other circumstances, and be led to conclusions which would be instantly rejected by a dispassionate understanding.

While the mind is in this state of excitement, it has a sort of elective attraction (if we may borrow an illustration from chemical science) for some ideas to the neglect of all others. It singles out from the number presented to it those which are connected with the prevailing emotion, while the rest are overlooked and forgotten. In examining any question, it may really comprehend all the arguments submitted to it; but, at the conclusion of the review, those only are retained which have been illuminated by the predominant passion; and since opinions, as we have seen, are the result of the considerations which have been attended to and are in sight, not of such as have been overlooked and have vanished, it is those by which the judgment will be determined.

In this way self-interest, hope, fear, love, hatred, and the

other passions, may any of them draw the mind from a perfect survey of a subject, and fix its attention on a partial view, may exaggerate the importance of some objects and diminish that of others, and by this virtual distortion of appearances affect its perceptions of truth.

The peculiar effects of passion, which we have been describing, are evidently involuntary, and perhaps few are conscious of them in their own case, but such as have been accustomed to examine the movements of their sensitive and intellectual powers. It deserves to be remarked likewise, that our good as well as our bad passions, our kind as well as our malevolent feelings, may equally operate as principles of suggestion; and being also equally conducive to that partiality of attention, that peculiar vividness of ideas, which we have attempted to explain, are of course equally liable to mislead the judgment.

We are prepared by these observations to examine the justness of the common saying, 'quod volumus facile credimus,' 'We readily believe what is agreeable to our wishes,' a saying which may at first sight seem at variance with our former conclusions. This, like many other maxims current in the world, points at a truth without much precision. Mere wishes have in fact no influence on the understanding; they are totally inoperative till there appears to be some reason for expecting what we wish, till, in short, they are transformed into hope, and then we are strongly disposed to believe what is consonant with our anticipations. If instead of having a ground for hope, we have a reason for fear, our apprehension disposes us, in the same way, to believe the reverse of what we wish. Thus, so far is it from being true, that mere wishes tend to beget readiness of belief, we here see that there are cases in which we have a readiness to believe what is repugnant to our wishes.

In the instances both of hope and of fear, there must be considerations presented to the understanding to produce them; and those passions subsequently react upon the intellect, by concentrating its attention upon the considerations to which they owe their birth, and upon others of a similar tendency. This effect is evidently not attributable to the will, on which hope and fear are themselves perfectly independent.

The manner, in which the emotions of any one operate on his belief, may receive illustration from what takes place when the peculiar circumstances, by which a man is surrounded, tend to keep some considerations appertaining to a disputable subject more steadily before his attention than others. If it be true, that our feelings affect our belief by the vividness which they impart to particular ideas, or, what is the same thing, by turning the attention more intensely on such ideas; then whatever has the tendency to create the same partiality of attention, must have a corresponding effect on our opinions. Such a cause may be found in the sentiments of those amongst whom a man happens to be thrown. In the majority of instances, however dissimilar the opinions of an individual may have originally been, they will gradually conform to those of the community at large, or at least of his immediate associates; an effect which takes place, not because the arguments for the latter are stronger than those of the opposite side, but because they are perpetually kept before his mind, to the exclusion of adverse considerations.* Thus we sometimes see instances of

* 'Our opinions of all kinds,' says Hume, 'are strongly affected by society and sympathy, and it is almost impossible for us to support any principle or sentiment against the universal consent of every one, with whom we have any friendship or correspondence.'—*A Dissertation on the Passions.*

men, who are led to entertain a peculiar opinion, but who, on finding all around them dissent from it, and discovering it to be the object of reproach and invective, begin to be staggered in their faith, and grow more and more doubtful, till the general voice has triumphed over their sentiments and reduced them to acquiescence. In this case, the circumstance of the general opinion being against them withdraws their attention from their own peculiar views, forcibly and continually fixing it on the considerations which influence others. The sentiments of their fellow creatures draw around them a circle of attraction, from which they can rarely step to contemplate other objects; and they gradually lose their peculiarities of thinking, from the mere circumstance of the considerations on which they are founded being seldom presented to their understandings. It is on the same principle that some of the most striking effects of eloquence are to be accounted for. Who, that has listened to some masterly exhibition of opinions contrary to his own, but has felt his mind shaken from its confirmed principles, till the vividness of the impression has died away, and suffered other considerations to reappear?

In regard to a single and perfectly independent proposition, there is evidently no room for any difference of opinion, except that which may arise from affixing different ideas to the same terms. As few propositions, nevertheless, are so independent as not to be connected in some way with others, when any one is singly presented to the mind we generally form our estimate of it by the application of arguments and considerations, which are naturally suggested in the various modes already described. But when a question involves a long train of propositions, each of which may depend on many others, there is infinitely more room for the operation of ambiguities of language,

preconceived notions, inequalities of intellect, and diversities of feeling. In considering such a question, moreover, it is impossible to have all the arguments which bear upon it present at once to the recollection; a thousand considerations will pass before the mind, prompted by passion or prejudice, or other causes; and those, to which the state of our feelings or any other circumstance has given an adventitious prominence, will naturally remain in view and determine our opinions.

Emotions, it is obvious, have less room to operate in proportion to the perspicuity of our views. With regard to opinions of which we have a distinct and thorough conviction, the state of our feelings can make no difference.

The process of reasoning, by which we perceive them to be demonstrated, may be so clear and forcible, that the passions can have as little effect as in the consideration of a geometrical theorem. It is only in regard to vague opinions, arising from the complicated and doubtful nature of the subject, or from partial and indistinct views, that the feelings can have any great influence; and they may accordingly be expected to have considerable power in the consideration of questions which furnish various conflicting arguments, and in the case of men whose notions are loose and undefined, without the ties of logical dependence and consistent principle.

It would be vain, perhaps, to attempt an estimate of the comparative efficiency of the causes producing diversity of opinion, since they doubtless affect different minds in different proportions. Some men are infinitely less affected by hereditary prejudices than others; some are full of feeling; some dispassionate; some are of weak and confused, and some of clear and vigorous intellects.

With regard to the major part of mankind, however, it

will not be disputed, that traditionary prejudices and early associations have a predominant influence, imparting a tincture to every subject, and leaving traces in every conclusion.

Any of the causes, which have been enumerated, acting singly, might be expected to create considerable diversities of sentiment; but when we reflect, that several are generally in operation at the same time, we cannot hesitate to pronounce them perfectly adequate to account for all those varieties of opinion, in relation to the same subject, which are daily exposed to our observation.

SECTION VII.

ON BELIEF AND OPINIONS AS OBJECTS OF MORAL APPROBATION AND DISAPPROBATION, REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS.

THE remarks in the preceding part of this Essay, if they are correct, necessarily lead to some important conclusions. By the universal consent of the reason and feelings of mankind, what is involuntary cannot involve any merit or demerit on the part of the agent. Results which are not the consequences of volition cannot be the proper objects of moral praise and blame.* These are the dictates of nature, truths felt by all: even the child, who is reprehended by his parent for accidental mischief, instinctively prefers the plea, that he could not help it; and if we inquire into the final cause of this part of our nature, the reason of our being so constituted as to feel moral approbation and disapprobation only at those actions which are voluntary, we shall probably find it in the

* Hume, indeed, has controverted this, but it would not, I think, be a difficult task to show the sources of his erroneous conclusions on the subject, were it necessary to combat a doctrine at variance with the whole of our moral feelings. See his Treatise on Morals. The common, or rather universal sentiment on this point, is thus expressed by Bishop Butler: 'We never, in the moral way, applaud or blame either ourselves or others for what we enjoy or what we suffer, or for having impressions made upon us which we consider as altogether out of our power; but only for what we do, or would have done, had it been in our power; or for what we leave undone which we might have done, or would have left undone, though we could have done it.' — *Dissertation on the Nature of Virtue.*

obvious circumstance, that it is such actions alone which praise and blame can promote and prevent.

It follows, that those states of the understanding which we term belief, doubt, and disbelief, inasmuch as they are not voluntary, nor the result of any exertion of the will, imply neither merit nor demerit in him who is the subject of them. Whatever be the state of a man's understanding in relation to any possible proposition, it is a state or affection devoid equally of desert and culpability. The nature of an opinion cannot make it criminal. In relation to the same subject, one may believe, another doubt, and a third disbelieve, and all with equal innocence.

There may, it is true, be considerable merit or demerit attached to the manner in which an inquiry is prosecuted. The labor and research which a man bestows, in order to determine any important question, and the impartiality with which he conducts the examination, may be entitled to our warmest applause. On the other hand, it is reprehensible for any one to be swayed in his conduct by interest or passion, to reject opportunities of information, to be designedly partial in examining evidence, to be deaf to whatever is urged on one side of a question, and lend all his attention to the other. These acts, although they may be totally ineffectual in accomplishing their aim, are all proper subjects of moral obloquy, and may be left to the indignation and contempt which they deserve; but they relate to the conduct of men as to the selection of those circumstances or ideas which they allow to operate on their minds, and are not to be confounded with the states or affections of the understanding, on which it is possible, after all, that they may not produce the slightest effect.*

* It deserves to be remarked, that all institutions annexing advantages to the belief, or rather to the profession, of any fixed doctrines, have a tendency to beget this partiality of investigation;

No one, perhaps, will dispute, that when a man acts without intentional partiality in the examination of a question, he cannot be at all culpable for the effect which follows, whether the research terminate in faith or incredulity; because it is the necessary and involuntary consequence of the views presented to his understanding, without the slightest interference of choice: but it will probably be alleged, that in so far as belief, doubt, and disbelief, have been the result of wilful partiality of attention, they may be regarded with propriety as culpable, since it is common to blame a man for those things, which, although involuntary in themselves, are the result of voluntary acts. To this it may be replied, that it is, to say the least, a want of precision to apply blame in such a manner: it is always more correct to regard men as culpable on account of their voluntary acts, than on account of the results over which volition has no immediate control. There would, nevertheless, be little objection to considering opinions as reprehensible in so far as they were the result of unfair investigation, if it could be rendered a useful or practical principle. In all cases where we make involuntary effects the objects of moral reprehension, it is because they are certain proofs or positive indications of the voluntary acts which have preceded them. Opinions, however, are not effects of this kind; they are not positive indications of any voluntary acts; they furnish no criterion of the fairness or unfairness of investigation, since the most opposite results, the most contrary opinions, may ensue from the same degree of impartiality and application. Voluntary partiality of attention, as we have already seen, can be at the utmost but of slight and casual efficiency in the formation of

since every man, not totally destitute of integrity, will strive to make his opinions conformable to his professions.

opinions; it has often no effect whatever, and its influence will always be mingled with that of more powerful causes. Hence the share which it has had in the production of belief, doubt, or disbelief, can never be ascertained by the nature of the result. Whether a man has been partial or impartial, in the process by which he has acquired his opinions, must be determined by extrinsic circumstances, and not by the character of the opinions themselves. Belief, doubt, and disbelief, therefore, can never, even in the character of indications of antecedent voluntary acts, be the proper objects of moral reprehension or commendation. Our approbation and disapprobation, if they fall anywhere, should be directed to the conduct of men in their researches, to the use which they make of their opportunities of information, and to the partiality and impartiality visible in their actions.

If belief, doubt, and disbelief, are involuntary states of the understanding, which cannot be affected by the application of motives, and which can involve no moral merit or demerit, it follows, as a necessary consequence, that they do not fall within the province of legislation; that they are not proper subjects of rewards and punishments.

The only rational aim of rewards and punishments is to encourage and repress those actions or events to which they are applied. When they have no tendency to produce these effects it is evidently absurd to apply them, since it is an employment of means which have no connection with the end to be produced. In this predicament is the application of rewards and punishments to the state of the understanding, or, in other words, to opinions. The allurements and the menaces of power are alike incapable of establishing opinions in the mind, or eradicating those which are already there. They may draw hypocritical professions from avarice and ambition, or extort verbal

renunciations from fear and feebleness; but this is all they can accomplish. The way to alter belief is not to address motives to the will, but arguments to the intellect. To do otherwise, to apply rewards and punishments to opinions, is as absurd as to raise men to the peerage for their ruddy complexions, to whip them for the gout, and hang them for the scrofula. The fatal consequences of regarding opinions as proper objects of penal laws, will claim our notice in the ensuing section. It will suffice at present to draw the conclusion, that all pain, mental or physical, inflicted with a view to punish a man for his opinions, is nothing less than useless and wanton cruelty, violating the plain dictate of nature, which forbids the production of evil in all cases where it is not consecrated by superior beneficial effects.

In contending that neither merit nor demerit can be imputed to any one for his opinions, it is almost unnecessary to say, we are not contending that it is of no importance what opinions he entertains. We are advocating the innocence of the man, not the harmlessness of his views. Errors, as we shall have occasion to show in a subsequent essay, are by their nature injurious to society; and while he who really believes them ought to be regarded as perfectly free from culpability, every one who sees them in a different light is justified in endeavoring, by proper means, to lessen their influence; which is to be effected, not by the application of obloquy and punishment, but by addressing arguments to the understanding.

A distinction is also to be made between the state of the understanding and the manifestation of that state; or, in other words, between holding opinions and expressing them. While the former is independent of the will, and, therefore, free from moral culpability, the latter is always a voluntary act, and, being neutral in itself, may be com-

mendable or reprehensible according to the circumstances in which it takes place. Whether it is a proper object of rewards and punishments will form hereafter a separate topic of consideration.

SECTION VIII.

ON THE EVIL CONSEQUENCES OF THE COMMON ERRORS ON THIS SUBJECT.

Few speculative errors appear to have produced evil consequences so many and so extensive, as the notion that belief, doubt, and disbelief, are voluntary acts involving moral merit and demerit. One of its most obvious effects has been to draw mankind from an attention to moral conduct and lead them to regard the belief of certain tenets as far more deserving of approbation than a course of the most consistent virtue. Where such a doctrine prevails, where opinions are considered of paramount importance to actions, it is no wonder if the ties of morality are loosened. The error under consideration has also produced much secret misery, by loading the minds of the timid and conscientious with the imaginary guilt of holding opinions which they regarded with horror while they could not avoid them. What is still worse, it has frequently alarmed the inquirer into an abandonment of the pursuit of truth. Under a confused supposition of criminality in the belief of particular doctrines, men have with reason been deterred from examining evidence, lest it should irresistibly lead them to views which it might be culpable to entertain. If it is really true, indeed, that the least deviation from a given line of opinion will be attended with guilt, the only safe course is to exclude all examination, to shun every research which might, by possibility, terminate in any such result. When it is already fixed and determined that an investigation must end in a prescribed way, otherwise the inquirer will be involved in criminality, all

inquiry becomes not only useless but foolish. This apprehension of the consequences of research once extended even to natural philosophy; and there is little doubt that it may be justly charged by moral science with much of the slowness of its progress. If the former has long since emancipated itself from this error, the latter still confessedly labors under its oppression. The intellect is still intimidated into a desertion of every track which appears to lead to conclusions at variance with the prescribed modes of thinking.*

'Men grow pale
Lest their own judgments should become too bright,
And their free thoughts be crimes, and Earth have too much light.' †

If it be objected to this representation, that those who regard belief as a voluntary act cannot consistently fear the result of examination on their own minds, since, according to their fundamental position, it will always be in their power to think as they please; it may be a sufficient reply to say, that it is not intended to accuse them of reasoning consistently from the principles which they assume. The truth is, there has been the utmost confusion in this respect. Although men must, in all probability, have had a notion, however vague and obscure, that belief was dependent on the will, before they could have inferred it to be criminal, yet they have often retained the conclusion

* See Note B.

† Such are evidently not to be ranked amongst the disciples of Bacon, who says, 'Let no man, upon a weak conceit of sobriety, or an ill-applied moderation, think or maintain, that a man can search too far, or be too well studied in the book of God's word, or in the book of God's works, divinity or philosophy; but, rather, let men endeavor an endless progress or proficience in both.'— *Of the Proficience and Advancement of Learning*, book i.

and dropped the premises. They have sometimes thought and acted as if opinions were voluntary and criminal, sometimes, as if they were at once criminal and involuntary. If the mistaken principle, that belief is governed by volition, had been rigorously pursued through all its consequences, it would have been immediately exploded. It is to the want of precise and consistent thinking on the subject that so many evil consequences are to be traced.

It is probable, that the same error with regard to the nature of belief has been one principal cause of requiring subscriptions, or other outward manifestations of assent, to a long list of abstruse, complex, and often unintelligible doctrines, in order to qualify the aspirant not only for ecclesiastical, but even for civil and military offices. On no other hypothesis, at least, could the practice be justified of making the profession of certain opinions the indispensable preliminary to personal exaltation, the stepping-stone to fortune and to power. Had not those who first devised this mode of obtaining unanimity had strong, although perhaps undefined impressions of the voluntary character of belief, they would, in all likelihood, have fallen upon the far more rational expedient of requiring, instead of a positive profession of faith, a pledge not to avow nor to inculcate any doctrines contrary to what were prescribed. This, though not free from numerous objections, would at least have been requiring what it was in every man's power to perform, while it would have presented no temptation to sacrifice, at the entrance of his career, his candor, or at all events his veracity.

Whether we acquiesce or not, however, in the supposition, that an impression of the voluntary nature of belief had a considerable share in the first institution of articles and subscriptions, it is plain that the practice could not have been consistently enforced under the general prevalence of the contrary doctrine.

There is one thing, indeed, which even then might have justified the enforcement of such a regulation, the improbability of any one subscribing a creed who could not conscientiously do it. On this point, let those decide who are aware of the causes which necessarily generate diversities of opinion, and who can, at the same time, estimate the chance which, in such an affair, the scruples of conscience have of maintaining their ground against the temptations of interest or the blandishments of power.

But the most fatal consequences of the speculative error under consideration are to be found in the repeated attempts to regulate men's creeds by the application of intimidation and punishment; in the intolerance and persecution which have disgraced the history of the human race. The natural consequence of imputing guilt to opinions was an endeavor to prevent and to punish them; and, as such a course coincided with the gratification of the malignant passions of our nature, nothing less could be expected than that it would be pursued with eagerness and marked by cruelty.

It will probably be urged, that since a man's opinions are not to be read in his gestures or countenance, punishments cannot be applied till the opinions are expressed; and that when they have been inflicted, it has been done, not to alter his creed nor to punish him for holding it, but to prevent its propagation. If we look, however, into the history of mankind, we shall discover, that to prevent the propagation of opinions has not been the sole object of such penal inflictions. We shall find, that the aim of the persecutor has been, not only to prevent obnoxious opinions from spreading, but to punish the presumed guilt of holding them, and sometimes to convert the sufferers. He has accordingly directed his fury against innocent actions, merely expressive or indicative of opinions, and

having no tendency to propagate them, and has relented when his victims have been brought to profess a renunciation of their errors; his conduct evidently proceeding on the two assumptions, that belief was voluntary, so that a man might be induced or compelled to relinquish it; and, secondly, that if it differed from his own it was criminal, and therefore deserved to be punished.

The universal treatment of the Jews, from whom no contamination of faith could possibly be apprehended, is a standing proof of the prevalence and effects of these pernicious errors; and we need not go farther than the pages of our own history for additional instances and ample corroboration. 'The persons condemned to these punishments,' says Hume, in reference to the persecutions in the reign of the bloody and bigotted Mary, 'were not convicted of teaching or dogmatising, contrary to the established religion; they were seized merely on suspicion, and articles being offered them to subscribe, they were immediately upon their refusal condemned to the flames.'

These persecutors, it is plain (unless they were actuated solely by the vilest motives), must either have thought it possible to eradicate opinions from the mind by violence, and force others upon it, or have labored under a strange infatuation of conceiving, that they could render God and man service by destroying the sincerity of their fellow creatures, and compelling them to make professions at variance with their real conviction. Perhaps, sometimes one and sometimes the other of these notions actuated the minds of the bigots. Sometimes they might think, that if a poor wretch could be forced by intimidation or torture to acknowledge the truth of a creed, he would really believe it: and sometimes, that it was a valuable triumph to extort a few words from the weakness of nature, how

contrary soever they might be to the real sentiments of their victims. It is probable, however, that their minds were never entirely free from confused notions of the voluntary nature of belief, of the consequent possibility of altering opinions by the application of motives, and of the criminality of holding any creed but their own. These principles seem to have actuated more or less all religious persecutors. Even the victims themselves appear, in many instances, not to have called in question the right of persecution, but only the propriety of its exercise on their own persons. Both the persecutors and the persecuted have united in maintaining that the holders of wrong opinions deserved the vengeance of the community, and differed only as to the objects on whom it ought to fall. In reading the history of intolerance, our pity for the sufferers is often neutralized by a detestation of their principles, by a knowledge that they would have inflicted equal tortures on their adversaries, had they had equal power; and all that is left for us to do is to mourn over the degradation of our common nature. Thus we find many of the reformers in England, Switzerland, and Germany, as unsparing in their persecution of those who departed from their tenets as the most bigoted adherents to the ancient religion. Of this a striking and memorable instance is furnished by our own annals in the case of a Dr. Barnes. This man, who had himself renounced the established doctrine regarding transubstantiation, was exasperated that another person, of the name of Lambert, had taken a different ground in his dissent from it.

'By the present laws and practice,' says Hume, 'Barnes was no less exposed to the stake than Lambert; yet such was the persecuting rage which prevailed, that he was determined to bring this man to condign punishment; because, in their common departure from the ancient faith,

he had dared to go one step farther than himself.' It is almost needless to add, that this wretched bigot succeeded in his object; and the reader of his history, in the first warmth of indignation, hardly regrets that he met with a persecutor in his turn, and perished at the stake.

We find even Cranmer, the mild, the moderate, the amiable, the beneficent, (it is thus he is represented by historians,) we find even such a character consigning a poor female to the flames because her opinions were not quite orthodox. Nor is it to be forgotten, that the gentle and dispassionate Melancthon expressed his decided approbation of the burning of Servetus, and his wonder that any body could be found to condemn it. Nothing can more strikingly show the pernicious influence of this single error.

But although it is scarcely to be conceived, that intolerance and persecution would have been carried to such an excess, had it not been for the fundamental error here noticed, it is not to be denied that many other causes have mingled their influence; and it will not be altogether foreign to the tenor of this essay to bestow upon them a passing notice. There seems to be a principle inherent in the nature of man, that leads him to seek for the approbation of his fellow-creatures, not only in his actions, but in his modes of thinking. He covets the concurrence of others, and is uneasy under dissent and disagreement. Objections to his opinions seem to place a disagreeable impediment in the way of his imagination; they disturb his self-complacency, and render him restless and uneasy. This, of itself, is sufficient to make him regard with displeasure and resentment all those who are of a different opinion from his own. Men, even of the best regulated minds and mildest dispositions, find it difficult to argue with uniform coolness and temper. A debate, from a

contest of arguments often becomes a contest of passions. We resent, not only the opposition to our doctrines but the presumption of the opponent, and grow eager to chastise it. Love of truth, if we originally had it, is soon lost in the desire of avenging our mortified vanity; and the rancor of our feelings being exasperated by every detection of the weakness of our arguments, recourse is had to violence to overwhelm those whom we cannot confute.

As we partly seek for the concurrence of others on account of the corroboration which it affords of the truth of our own sentiments, it is observable, that those men in general are the least hurt at opposition, who, having a clear discernment of the foundation of their tenets, least require the support of other people's approbation; and that the prejudiced and the ignorant, men of narrow views and confused notions, always display the most inveterate intolerance. 'While men,' to borrow the words of the classical historian already quoted, 'zealously maintain what they neither clearly comprehend, nor entirely believe, they are shaken in their imagined faith by the opposite persuasion, or even doubts of other men; and vent on their antagonists that impatience, which is the natural result of so disagreeable a state of the understanding.' *

* It is a curious fact, which, I think, may be observed in the history of persecution, that men are generally more inclined to punish those who believe less than they themselves do, than those who believe more. We pity rather than condemn the extravagances of fanaticism, and the absurdities of superstition; but are apt to grow angry at the speculations of scepticism. If any one superadds something to the established creed, his conduct is viewed with tolerable composure; it is when he attempts to subtract from it, that he provokes indignation. Is it that we feel a sort of superiority at perceiving the absurdity of what others believe, and, on the other hand, are mortified when any body else appears to arrogate the same superiority over ourselves? †

† See Note C.

The state of doubt is, indeed, a state of trouble, to which every one will be averse in proportion as he is unaccustomed to intellectual exertion and candid inquiry. Hence, whoever takes his opinions on trust has a thorough repugnance to be disturbed by contrary arguments. This, as Berkeley remarks, is observable even in the literary world. 'Two sorts of learned men there are,' says he: 'one, who candidly seek truth by rational means. These are never averse to have their principles looked into, and examined by the test of reason. Another sort there is, who learn by *rote* a set of principles and a way of thinking which happen to be in vogue. These betray themselves by their anger and surprise, whenever their principles are freely canvassed.' *

But the mortification arising from controversy, and the uneasiness of doubt, are comparatively transient and irregular motives of persecution. We may find more fixed and steady sources of intolerance in the connection often subsisting between men's permanent interests, or favorite objects, and the maintenance of certain doctrines. Those persons are peculiarly rancorous against dissent and opposition, who have assumed an opinion, probably without comprehending it, and without the least concern about its truth, from selfish and mercenary views. When the emolument, power, pride, personal consequence, or gratification of any one becomes identified with a doctrine or system, he is impatient and resentful at the slightest doubt; because every doubt is of the nature of a personal attack, and threatens danger to the objects of his regard. It is this identification of personal interests with systems of opinions, which has in all ages been one of the greatest sources of intolerance on the part of the priesthood. It

* A Defence of Free Thinking in Mathematics.

is this, which has led them to represent, with so much zeal, a departure from their dogmas as one of the worst of crimes, and often caused them to pursue with remorseless cruelty all aberrations from that creed on which their power and importance depended.

It becomes an interesting inquiry, how far these causes of intolerance continue in action in the present day, and in our own country. In the first place, with regard to such as are discoverable in the passions of mankind, we can only look for a mitigation in so far as those passions are weakened, or placed under stricter control. Men are still inflamed with resentment and opposition, and are ready to defend, by other than intellectual means, the doctrines with which their interest, power, and importance are indissolubly interwoven. But besides that the spirits of all such are probably softened by the improvement of the age (for it is the tendency of civilization to mitigate the irascible passions,) they are no longer permitted by the moral sympathies of mankind to manifest their resentment and mortification by the same violent methods. Reproach and invective must now, in most cases, content that selfish bigotry, which, in a former age, would have had recourse to more formidable weapons.

In the second place, if the practices of the world receive any amelioration from its advancement in knowledge, if the one keep pace with the other, we may rationally expect to see a diminution of intolerance, in so far as it is founded in ignorance and error. Society, accordingly, no longer presents us with the same outrageous scenes of persecution, and mad attempts on men's understandings. We no longer witness the same compulsory methods of obtaining subscriptions to creeds, nor do we even hear the same violent denunciations against heresy and dissent. The fundamental error, of imputing guilt to a man on

account of his opinions, has shrunk within narrower bounds; but it is nevertheless far from being exterminated. Men have extended their sphere of liberality, they have expanded their system of toleration, but it is not yet without limits. There is still a boundary in speculation, beyond which no one is allowed to proceed; at which innocence terminates and guilt commences; a boundary not fixed and determinate, but varying with the creed of every party.

Although the advanced civilization of the age rejects the palpably absurd application of torture and death, it is not to be concealed, that, amongst a numerous class, there is an analogous, though less barbarous persecution, of all who depart from received doctrines — the persecution of private antipathy and public odium. They are looked upon as a species of criminals, and their deviations from established opinions, or, if any one prefers the phrase, their speculative errors, are regarded by many with as much horror as flagrant violations of morality. In the ordinary ranks of men, where exploded prejudices often linger for ages, this is scarcely to be wondered at; but it is painful, and on a first view unaccountable, to witness the prevalence of the same spirit in the republic of letters; to see mistakes in speculation pursued with all the warmth of moral indignation and reproach. He who believes an opinion on the authority of others, who has taken no pains to investigate its claims to credibility, nor weighed the objections to the evidence on which it rests, is lauded for his acquiescence, while obloquy from every side is too often heaped on the man, who has minutely searched into the subject, and been led to an opposite conclusion. There are few things more disgusting to an enlightened mind than to see a number of men, a mob, whether learned or illiterate, who have never scrutinized the foundation of

their opinions, assailing with contumely an individual, who, after the labor of research and reflection, has adopted different sentiments from theirs, and pluming themselves on the notion of superior virtue, because their understandings have been tenacious of prejudice.*

This conduct is the more remarkable, as on every side we meet with the admission, that belief is not dependent on the will; and yet the same men, by whom this admission is readily made, will argue and inveigh on the virtual assumption of the contrary.

This is a striking proof, amongst a multitude of others, of what the thinking mind must have frequently observed, that a principle is often retained in its applications, long after it has been discarded as an abstract proposition. In a subject of so much importance, however, it behoves intelligent men to be rigidly consistent. If our opinions are not voluntary, but independent of the will, the contrary doctrine and all its consequences ought to be practically abandoned; they ought to be weeded from the sentiments, habits, and institutions of society. We may venture to assert, that neither the virtue nor the happiness of man will ever be placed on a perfectly firm basis, till this fundamental error has been extirpated from the human mind.

* See Note D.

ESSAY

ON

THE PUBLICATION OF OPINIONS.

ESSAY II.

ON THE PUBLICATION OF OPINIONS.

SECTION I.

INTRODUCTION.

It has been shown in the preceding essay, that belief is an involuntary act or state of the understanding, which cannot be affected by rewards and punishments; and that, consequently, opinions are not the proper subjects of legislation. The publication of opinions, however, being a voluntary act, the propriety or impropriety of interfering with it must be determined by other principles. The advocates of restraints on the freedom of public discussion, renouncing the criminality of opinions as a ground of legislative enactments, may be conceived as urging the following arguments.

'The formation of opinions may not depend on the will: but the communication of them being voluntary, it is surely wise to prevent the dissemination of such as have an injurious tendency, which can be effected only by attaching a punishment to it. In the same way that we are justified in restraining the liberty of a man who arrives from a country infected with the plague, by making him perform quarantine; we are justified in restraining the liberty of every man who entertains opinions of an evil

tendency, by requiring him to keep them to himself. And as in the former case it is necessary to punish him who breaks through so salutary a restraint, so it is in the latter. This is all for which we contend. In either case there may be no criminality attaching to the individual, on account of his body or his mind being the seat of a noxious principle; but the community has a right to impose upon him whatever regulations are necessary to prevent its diffusion, and to inflict a penalty on the transgression of regulations so imposed.'

That the general principle involved in this reasoning is correct, there can be no doubt. A society has a perfect right to adopt such regulations for its own government, as have a preponderance of advantages. Utility, therefore, in the most comprehensive acceptation of the term, is the test by which every institution, every law, and every course of action must be tried. Restrictions of any kind must be acknowledged to be proper, if, taking in the whole of their consequences, they can be proved to be beneficial to the community, although they may be directed against actions involving no moral turpitude. The only point is to establish their beneficial tendency. The laws of quarantine furnish a good illustration of the general principle, but do not form a case at all analogous to that of restrictions on the publication of opinions. To render the cases parallel it would be necessary to suppose the phenomena of the human constitution to be different from what they are; that health was of a communicable nature, and could be imported into a country as well as disease, and that no regulations could be devised to admit the one without the other.

In this case, if the people were already afflicted with various disorders, and if it could be proved that the salubrious would on the whole preponderate over the noxious contagion, it is evident, that any restraints imposed with a

view to prevent the importation of disease, would debar the nation from a positive accession to their stock of health.

It is a similar effect to this, which, we shall endeavor to show, would ensue from restraints on the publication of opinions. Truth and error, in the one case, are as much intermixed, and as inseparable by human regulations, as health and disease would be in the other; they can only be admitted and excluded together; and, of the two, there are the strongest grounds for believing that the former must greatly prevail and finally triumph. Restrictions, therefore, on the publication of any opinions, would retard the advancement and dissemination of truth as much as any precautionary laws, under the circumstances supposed, would impede the propagation of health. These views it will be the aim of the following pages to illustrate. But as it may be questioned whether the happiness of mankind is promoted by truth and injured by error, a position on which the whole argument depends, it will be necessary to offer a few preliminary considerations in support of that important doctrine. After endeavoring to establish the conclusion, that the attainment of truth ought to be the sole object of all regulations affecting the publication of opinions, because error is injurious; we shall proceed to show, that the extrication of mankind from error will be most readily and effectually accomplished by perfect freedom of discussion; that to check inquiry and attempt to regulate the progress and direction of opinions, by proscriptions and penalties, is to disturb the order of nature, and is analogous, in its mischievous tendency, to the system of forcing the capital and industry of the community into channels which they would never spontaneously seek, instead of suffering private interest to direct them to their most profitable employment.

SECTION II.

ON THE MISCHIEFS OF ERROR, AND THE ADVANTAGES OF TRUTH.

Our inquiry into the mischiefs of error and the advantages of truth may be simplified by laying aside the sciences which have a reference to the material world, as no one will be found to doubt, that mistakes in physical knowledge must be injurious, and their overthrow beneficial. Or supposing that errors in these sciences may exist, without affecting the happiness of man, it is unquestionable, that the detection of such errors must also be harmless; and it will scarcely be contested, that the utility of these departments of knowledge must consist in the truth of their principles, and the justness of their application.

We may, therefore, limit our inquiry to the effects of truth in those sciences which treat of the powers, conduct, character, and condition of intelligent beings. The ultimate problem to be solved in all these sciences is, what is most conducive to the real happiness of mankind? Amidst the innumerable questions in theology, metaphysics, morals, and politics, it may not always be easy to discern, that to solve this problem is their final and their only rational aim: but it is, in reality, on the success with which they point out the true path of happiness, that their whole value depends, beyond what they possess as an exercise for the faculties, in common with a game at chess or a scholastic disputation, and what belongs to them as sources of sublime and pleasurable emotion, in common with the fictions of the poet and the painter. What is theology,

but a comprehensive examination into the course of action and condition of mind, which will please the Being who has the fate of mankind in his hands? What is metaphysics, but an inquiry into the nature of man, the extent of his faculties, his relations to the existences around him, and the bearing of all these on his condition? What is the science of morals, but an endeavor to find out what conduct will ultimately tend to his felicity? And what is that of politics, but a similar attempt to discover what public measures will promote the same end?

If the object of all these sciences is to inquire what is most conducive to the happiness of mankind, and if their value is proportioned to the success of that inquiry, error must of course be pernicious, or, on the most favorable supposition, useless. This proposition is, indeed, implied in the terms used. That we should be benefited by mistakes relative to the means of obtaining happiness is as palpable an absurdity as can be conceived.

In these moral inquiries, then, the nearer mankind approach to truth, the happier they will be, the better will they be able to avoid what is injurious, and adopt measures of positive utility. All errors must be deviations from the path of real good; and whether they tend to give man too high or too low an opinion of his nature and destiny, to fill his mind with fancied relations which do not exist, or destroy his belief in those which are in being; whether they give him mistaken ideas of moral obligation, or impose a wrong standard of moral conduct; whether they mislead him in his social or in his political measures, they are alike detrimental, although they may differ in the degree of their mischievous tendency. In a word, whatever is the real condition, nature, and destination of man, it is important for him to know the truth, that his conduct may be regulated accordingly, that his efforts

after happiness may be properly directed, that he may be the sport of neither delusive hopes nor groundless fears, that he may not sink under remediable evils, nor lose attainable good.

To argue that truth is not beneficial, is to contend that it is useless to know the direct road to the place which is the object of our journey; to affirm that error is not injurious, is to advocate the harmlessness or the advantages of wandering in ignorance and being led astray by deception.*

There are errors, it is true, which may be allowed to produce accidental benefit, and others, which, by supplying in some degree the place of truths, may be the source of partial good, and the subversion of which may be attended with temporary evil. The discovery of truth may occasionally resemble in its effects the invention of mechanical improvements, which, on their first introduction, sometimes beget injury to individuals, and even transitory inconvenience to society. But partial and transitory evil can be no solid objection to the introduction of general and permanent good. There is not the semblance of a reason, why the welfare of the community at large should be sacrificed to the advantage of a few; or why a small and transient injury should not be endured for the sake of a great and lasting benefit. If errors are ever useful they are less useful than truth, and are therefore absolute evils.† 'Utility and truth are not to be

* See Note E.

† En effet le caractere distinctif ne la vérité est d'être également et constamment advantaguese à tous les partis, tandis que le mensonge, utile pour quelques instans seulement à quelques individus, est toujours nuisible à tous les autres.' — *Du Marsais on Prejudice, as quoted in the Retrospective Review*, p. 75.

divided,' says Bishop Berkeley, 'the general good of mankind being the rule or measure of moral truth.'*

With regard to the collateral advantages of the various branches of knowledge, consisting in the improvement of the faculties, and the pleasure which they immediately impart, irrespective of their ulterior usefulness, it will scarcely be necessary to prove, that truth cannot be inimical to either. It will be admitted, at least, that the efficiency of any science in improving the powers of the mind can borrow nothing from its incorrectness; and we may, therefore, pass on to the second collateral advantage, and inquire whether error can be superior to truth as a source of immediate gratification.

Plausible and erroneous theories may be admitted, in some cases, to impart a pleasure to the mind, while they impose themselves upon it as true, equal to that which can be derived from the most accurate speculations; but if they sometimes confer an equal, they cannot in general be supposed to confer a superior pleasure. If we allow that the hypothesis of Descartes imparted ideas and emotions to the astronomer of those days nowise inferior in point of interest and sublimity to those excited, at a later period, by the discoveries of Newton, it is the utmost limit of supposition, and we have not the shadow of a reason for giving the superiority to the former. On the contrary, unless we choose to suppose, that the chimeras of man's imagination are better calculated to excite pleasure and admiration than the real order and constitution of nature, we must admit, that every discovery of her laws, every detection of error, and every advance in true knowledge, must have a tendency to exalt our sources of enjoyment. In the physical sciences, at least, we may take it for granted, that error cannot bring a real increase of

* A Discourse addressed to Magistrates and Men in Authority.

pleasure; but in religion, morals, metaphysics, and politics, may not there be pleasant delusions; falsehoods, which delight while they do no harm; dreams, the scene of which is placed beyond the reach of earthly changes, and which, as they are not assailable by time, may be cherished without the risk of being destroyed, and without any possible train of pernicious consequences; and may not these delusions bestow consolation and happiness superior to the cold realities of truth? May not the benevolent mind derive more gratification from extravagant expectations of the extinction of vice and misery, and the perfectibility of man, than from juster views of the constitution of human nature? And may not the enthusiast extract from his dreams of beatitude more real enjoyment, a greater sum of pleasurable emotion, than the rigid reasoner from more probable anticipations? Since the human mind is so constituted as to be capable of connecting its happiness with almost any opinions, a man may certainly derive considerable pleasure from such delusions as these, and suffer pain from their destruction;* yet it may be doubted whether, in general, juster

* On this point every one will agree with Lord Bacon: 'Doth any man doubt,' he asks, 'that if there were taken out of men's minds vain opinions, flattering hopes, false valuations, imaginations as one would, and the like, but it would leave the minds of a number of men poor, shrunken things, full of melancholy and indisposition, and unpleasing to themselves?' — *Essay on Truth.* His lordship, however, although he thus strongly portrays the disagreeable effects which would follow the destruction of these 'baseless fabrics,' is not to be considered as contending that they are a positive good, for in another passage he expressly marks their evil tendency. 'How many things are there,' he exclaims, 'which we imagine not! How many things do we esteem and value otherwise than they are! This ill-proportioned estimation, these vain imaginations, these be the clouds of error that turn into the storms of perturbation.' — *In Praise of Knowledge.*

speculations would not have afforded equal, and even superior gratification, had he originally formed them. But granting the contrary, in its utmost extent, it could happen only in the case of a few individuals. Men are so engaged with the objects immediately around them, that mere visionary notions of this sort could never be a common and abundant source of enjoyment; or, at least, could never possess any superiority in that character over sober and rational views; and if they were formed on insufficient grounds, as by the supposition they must be, that insufficiency would be liable occasionally to appear and throw the mind into doubt. So that, regarded even in this aspect, truth is the only sure and stable basis of happiness. But all the direct pleasure, which such delusions, how flattering soever to the imagination, could afford, would be no compensation for the ultimate evils attendant upon them. None of the dreams of enthusiasm are destitute of some bearing on practice. However remote they may appear from the present scene, and from the conduct of life, inferences will not fail to be drawn and applied from one to the other. These sanguine creations, and celestial visions, will be linked to the business of the world in the same way that the motions of the heavenly bodies, which were at first matters of mere curiosity to a few shepherds, were soon connected by the imaginations of men with human affairs, and rendered subservient to gross and wretched superstitions. The influence of delusions will be always detrimental to happiness, inasmuch as they have a tendency to withdraw men's attention from those subjects in which their welfare is really implicated, and lead to eccentric modes of action, incompatible with the regular and beneficial course of duty and discretion. They are liable, too, to be exalted into sacred articles of faith, and to swell into an imaginary

importance, which rouses all the energy of the passions in their support. It is thus that discord and dissension, intolerance and persecution, have sometimes been the bitter fruits of what was, at first, an apparently harmless and improbable dream. Nor is it to be forgotten, that delusions of this kind could never prevail without some weakness of understanding or imperfection of knowledge, incompatible with a thorough insight into the means of happiness, and therefore inconsistent with the highest state of felicity. A belief in them would necessarily involve logical errors, the consequences of which could not be confined to a single subject, but would extend themselves to others, where they might be highly injurious. The same fallacious principles, which deluded mankind on one occasion, with perhaps little detriment, would carry them from the direct path of their real interest, in affairs where such aberrations might be of vital importance.

SECTION III.

CONTINUATION OF THE SAME SUBJECT.

A DOUBT may, perhaps, be raised, whether the conclusions, which we have attempted to establish, as to the advantages of truth, are corroborated by the actual state of facts and the experience of mankind: whether error has, in reality, been found replete with such evils as theoretical deductions lead us to suppose.

Reasoning on the passions and principles of the human mind, perceiving its power of accommodation to circumstances, and how much man's real felicity depends on his peculiar temper and conduct, as well as on other causes which spring up and expire with himself; comparing various ages and nations, under different laws, customs, and religious institutions, and seeing in all the same round of business and pleasure, the same passions, the same hilarity in youth and sobriety in manhood, the same ardor of love between the sexes, the same attachment among friends, the same pursuit of wealth, power, and reputation, the same dissensions, the same crimes, and the same scenes of affliction, disease, and death; the philosopher may be induced to conclude, that, amidst the operation of so many principles, the state of opinions can have but a feeble influence on the happiness of private life. He may be ready to exclaim with the poet,

> 'How small, of all that human hearts endure,
> That part which laws or kings can cause or cure!' *

* Goldsmith.

And, extending the remark to moral science, conclude, that beyond the circle of common knowledge, which is forced on every mind, truth and error can be of importance only to speculative men; that it is of little moment what opinions prevail, while the results, on a comprehensive estimate, are so nearly similar and equal.

But, if he reason thus, he will overlook a thousand points, at which the state of moral, theological, and political opinions, touches on public welfare and private happiness. Knowledge of truth is essential to correctness of practice; and this is true, not only of individuals, but of communities. The prevalence of error may, therefore, be expected to manifest itself in absurd and pernicious practices and institutions; and we have only to look into the history of superstition and barbarism, to see its effects on the happiness of private life. Although that happiness may essentially depend on the qualities of individuals and their peculiar circumstances, is it of no importance that it should be secured from the violent interference of others? that even the chances of evil should be lessened? Is it no advantage to be free from the gloomy fears of superstition, to be absolved from the burden of fanatical rites, from absurd and mischievous institutions, from oppressive laws, and from a state of society in which unmeaning ceremonies are substituted for the duties of virtue? Are unrestrained liberty of innocent action, and security of property and existence, worthless? Is it nothing to be removed from the risk of the dungeon and the stake, for the conscientious profession of opinions; to be rid of the alternative of the scaffold on the one hand, and, on the other, the sacrifice of conscience and honor?

These are all causes by which the train of events constituting a man's life is evidently liable to be modified. They have a material share in shaping the circumstances

of the individual, and even enter largely into the formation of his character; so that even those features of his condition, which appear the most remote from such an influence, often derive their complexion from it. And what is it, that has extirpated these barbarities and produced these benefits but the progress of truth, the discovery of the real nature and tendencies of such practices and institutions? Let him that is sceptical as to the vast importance of truth, cast his eye down the long catalogue of crimes and cruelties which stain the annals of the past, and examine the melioration which has taken place in the practices of the world, and he will not again inquire into the nature of those advantages which follow the destruction of error. All the liberality of thinking which now prevails, the spirit of resistance to tyranny, the contempt of priestcraft, the comparative rarity and mildness of religious persecution, the mitigation of national prejudices, the disappearance of a number of mischievous superstitions, the abolition of superfluous, absurd, and sanguinary laws, are so many exemplifications of the benefits resulting from the progress of moral and political truth. They are triumphs, all of them, over established error, and imply, respectively, either the removal of a source of misery, or a positive addition to the sources of happiness. It is impossible for a moment to imagine, that if moral and political science had been thoroughly understood, the barbarities here noticed would have existed. A pernicious custom or an absurd law can never long prevail amidst a complete and universal appreciation of its character.

The science of political economy, that noble creation of modern times, throws the strongest lights on the extent to which the welfare of mankind may be affected by fallacious prejudices and false conclusions in national policy. To pass over the evils of restrictions on the com-

mercial intercourse of nations, from blind jealousy and absurd rivalship, the barriers everywhere opposed to the free exercise of industry, and the shackles by which enterprise has universally been crippled; we have only to appeal to the principles on which governments have regulated the circulating medium of their respective countries (more especially our own) to show the vast influence, which an apparently slight mistake may possess on the transactions and the condition of millions of the human race.

In the science of morals, the operation of a wrong speculative principle on society cannot, perhaps, be more strongly exemplified, than in the consequences of the particular error which formed a principal topic of the preceding essay. The most cursory glance at the history of persecution is sufficient to discover, that intolerance never could have existed in such intensity, had it not been for the almost universal prevalence of the notion, that guilt might be incurred by opinions. In various ages and countries, deviations from the received faith have been looked upon, by the community at large, with more abhorrence than the most criminal actions; and the consequence of this has been the perpetration of cruelties at which modern civilization shudders with horror. Let those who contend that speculative error can have but little influence on the happiness of private life, reflect a moment on the numbers of innocent and conscientious victims who have been destroyed by the Inquisition. It cannot surely be supposed, that these persecutions would ever have taken place, had the people at large been clearly convinced of the truth, that belief is an involuntary and therefore a guiltless state of the mind; or, in other words, had they not labored under the delusion, that opinions are the proper objects of punishment. Perse-

cution would be necessarily exterminated in any nation which universally felt its injustice and absurdity. The moral sympathies of mankind, which had been perverted by false notions, would resume their natural direction, and would never suffer punishment to fall upon those, who, in the apprehension of all, had been guilty of no crime. What else but the general prevalence of the error already mentioned, could have induced men, otherwise uninterested, to witness with tameness, nay even with satisfaction and delight, the most detestable barbarities inflicted by religious zeal? We are told, that in Spain and Portugal the spectators, who crowded to the executions for heresy, frequently testified extravagant joy. Even ladies would laugh and exult over the victims who were slowly consuming at the stake. In reviewing such scenes, we are pained to think how awfully mankind may be deluded, how their sagacity may be blinded, their sense of justice extinguished, their best feelings subverted, by fallacies of judgment; and we become ready to question, whether even vice itself ever produced half the evils of false notions and mistaken views.

'The observer must be blind indeed,' says an elegant author and enlightened philosopher, 'who does not perceive the vastness of the scale on which speculative principles, both right and wrong, have operated upon the present condition of mankind; or who does not now feel and acknowledge how deeply the morals and the happiness of private life, as well as the order of political society, are involved in the final issue of the contest between true and false philosophy.' *

* Dugald Stewart's Philosophical Essays, p. 67.

SECTION IV.

ON FREEDOM OF DISCUSSION AS THE MEANS OF ATTAINING TRUTH.

THE considerations offered in the preceding section are sufficient to show the extreme importance of just principles, and that mankind can never err in their speculative views without endangering their real welfare. It follows, as a necessary consequence, that the sole end of inquiry ought to be, not the support of any particular doctrines, but the attainment of truth, whatever may be the result to established systems. If, indeed, we admit the perniciousness of error, it is impossible to maintain any other object with even the appearance of reason. It is the sacred principle from which we ought never to swerve.* The inquiry, how truth is to be attained, becomes, therefore, in the highest degree interesting and important.

Nothing more, it is manifest, would be required for the destruction of error than some fixed and invariable standard of truth, which could be at once appealed to and be decisive of every controversy to the satisfaction of all mankind; but that no such standard exists, the slightest consideration will be sufficient to evince. If it be asserted, that on points of religion the sacred writings are such a standard, it may be urged in reply, that this is only an apparent exception; for, in the first place, we have no standard by which the authenticity of those writings can be determined beyond all liability to dispute; and, in the

* The reader will find some excellent remarks on the subject of this section in Paley's Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy. See the chapter on Toleration.

second place, supposing we had a test of this nature, or that the authenticity of the Scriptures was too evident to admit of the least doubt from the most perverse understanding, yet we have no decisive standard of interpretation.

Neither can we discover a standard of truth in the opinions of the majority of mankind, otherwise we might ascertain all truth by the simple process of counting votes. The majority of mankind are seldom free from error; they have often held opinions the most absurd, and at different times have entertained contradictory propositions.

It would be equally vain to look for a standard of truth in the judgment of any particular class of human beings. No rank, no office, no privileges, no attainments in wisdom or science, can be a security from error. Bodies of men, who have assumed infallibility, have, hitherto, always been mistaken.

Since, then, we have no fixed standard by which we can in all cases try the validity of opinions, as we can measure time and space; since we have no oracles of indisputable authenticity, or at least of incontrovertible meaning; since we cannot ascertain truth by putting opinions to the vote, nor by an appeal to any class or order of men, how are we to attain it, or by what means escape from error?

Although we have no absolute test of truth, yet we have faculties to discern it, and it is only by the unrestrained exercise of those faculties that we can hope to attain correct opinions. Our success in every subject will essentially depend on the completeness of the examination. But no individual mind is so acute and comprehensive, so free from passion and prejudice, and placed in such favorable circumstances, as in any complex question to see all the possible arguments on both sides in their

full force. Hence the co-operation of various minds becomes indispensably requisite. The greater the number of inquirers, the greater the probability of a successful result. Some will come to the inquiry under circumstances peculiarly favorable to success, some with faculties capable of penetrating where less acute ones fail, and some disengaged from passions and prejudices with which others are encumbered. While one directs his scrutiny to a particular view of the subject, another will regard it in a different aspect, a third will see it from a position inaccessible to his predecessors; and, by the comparison and collision of opinions, truth will be separated from error and emerge from obscurity. If attainable by human faculties, it must by such a process be ultimately evolved.

The way, then, to obtain this result is to permit all to be said on a subject that can be said. All error is the consequence of narrow and partial views, and can be removed only by having a question presented in all its possible bearings, or, in other words, by unlimited discussion. Where there is perfect freedom of examination, there is the greatest probability which it is possible to have that the truth will be ultimately attained. To impose the least restraint is to diminish this probability. It is to declare that we will not take into consideration all the possible arguments which can be presented, but that we will form our opinions on partial views. It is, therefore, to increase the probability of error. Nor need we, under the utmost freedom of discussion, be in any fear of an inundation of crude and preposterous speculations. All such will meet with a proper and effectual check in the neglect or ridicule of the public: none will have much influence but those which possess the plausibility bestowed by a considerable admixture of truth, and which it is

of importance should appear, that, amidst the contention of controversy, what is true may be separated from what is false.*

The objection, that the plan of unlimited discussion would introduce a multiplicity of erroneous speculations, is in reality directed against the very means of attaining the end. Though error is an absolute evil, it is frequently necessary to go through it to arrive at truth; as a man, to ascertain the nearest road from one place to another, may be obliged to make frequent deviations from the direct line. In the physical sciences, through how many errors has the path to truth frequently lain! What would have been the present state of knowledge, if no step had been hazarded without a perfect assurance of being right? Even the ideal theory of Berkeley and the scepticism of Hume have had their use in establishing human science on its just foundation.† We are midway in the stream of ignorance and error; and it is a poor argument against an attempt to reach the shore, that every step will be a plunge into the very element from which we are anxious to escape. Mankind, it is obvious, are not endowed with faculties to possess themselves at once of correct opinions on all subjects. On many questions they must expend painful and persevering efforts; they must often be mistaken, and often be set right, before they completely succeed. To stop them at any point in their career, to erect a barrier, and say, thus far your inquiries have proceeded, but here they must terminate, can scarcely fail to fix them in the midst of some error. It is prejudging all future efforts and all future opportunities of discovery, without a knowledge of their nature and extent. It is proclaiming, that whatever events may hereafter take

* See Note F. † See Note G.

place, whatever new principles may be evolved, whatever established fallacies may be exploded, how much soever the methods of investigating truth may be enlarged and enhanced in efficacy, and how gigantic soever may be the progress of the human mind in other departments of knowledge; yet no application of any of these improvements and discoveries shall be made to certain particular subjects, which shall be as fixed spots, immovable stations, amidst all the vicissitudes and advancement of science.

SECTION V.

ON THE ASSUMPTIONS INVOLVED IN ALL RESTRAINTS ON THE PUBLICATION OF OPINIONS.

THE arguments adduced in the last section have brought us to the conclusion, that unrestrained freedom of inquiry is the only, or at least the best and readiest way, of arriving at correct opinions. It may deserve a little attention, in the next place, to investigate the grounds on which all restrictions, if they are honestly intended for the benefit of the community, must proceed. They must evidently be founded, either on the position that the prevalence of truth would be productive of pernicious consequences, or, admitting its good consequences, on the positions, first, that truth has been attained, and secondly, that, having been attained, it stands in need of the protection and assistance of power in its contest with error.

That the prevalence of truth would contribute to the happiness of man, has already been enforced at some length; and in showing that there is no fixed standard or positive test of truth, we have, perhaps, sufficiently exposed the presumption of assuming, that truth has been infallibly attained. Nothing, in fact, could justify such an assumption but the possession of faculties not liable to mistake, or such palpable evidence on a subject as would render all restraints perfectly superfluous and absurd. The most thorough conviction of the truth of any opinions is far from being a proof of their correctness, or the slightest justification of any attempt at the forcible suppression of contrary sentiments. Had our predecessors, who were equally convinced of the truth of their tenets,

succeeded in stifling investigation, the world would have been still immersed in the darkness of superstition, and bound as fast as ever by the fetters of prejudice. They felt themselves, nevertheless, as firmly in the right as the present age can possibly feel, and were equally justified in acts of intolerance and persecution. Amidst the overwhelming proof afforded by the annals of the past, that mankind are continually liable to be deceived in their strongest convictions, it is a preposterous and unpardonable presumption, in any man, to set up the firmness of his own belief as an absolute criterion of truth.*

Every one must, of course, think his own opinions right; for if he thought them wrong, they would no longer be his opinions: but there is a wide difference between regarding ourselves as infallible, and being firmly convinced of the truth of our creed. When a man reflects on any particular doctrine, he may be impressed with a thorough conviction of the improbability or even impossibility of its being false: and so he may feel with regard to all his other opinions, when he makes them objects of separate contemplation. And yet, when he views them in the aggregate, when he reflects, that not a single being on the earth holds collectively the same, when he looks at the past history and present state of mankind, and observes the various creeds of different ages and nations, the peculiar modes of thinking of sects, and bodies and individuals, the notions once firmly held, which have been exploded, the prejudices once universally prevalent, which have been removed, and the endless controversies, which have distracted those who have made it the business of their lives to arrive at the truth; and when he further dwells on the consideration, that many of these his fellow-creatures

* See Note H.

have had a conviction of the justness of their respective sentiments equal to his own, he cannot help the obvious inference, that in his own opinions it is next to impossible that there is not an admixture of error; that there is an infinitely greater probability of his being wrong in some, than right in all.

Every man of common sense and common candor, although he may have no suspicion where his mistakes lie, must have this general suspicion of his own fallibility; and, if he act consistently, he will not seek to suppress opinions by force, because in so doing he might be at once lending support to error, and destroying the only means of its detection. In endeavoring to spread his opinions, and to suppress all others by the arm of power, the utmost success would have no tendency to lay open the least of those mistakes which had insinuated themselves into his creed; but in propagating his opinions by arguments, by appeals to the discrimination of his fellow-men, he would be contributing alike to the detection of his own errors and to the overthrow of those of his antagonists.

It remains to consider, in the next place, the assumption, implied in all restrictions on inquiry, that truth, in its contest with error, stands in need of the protection of human authority.

Men have long since found out how ridiculous is the interference of authority in physical and mathematical science; when will they learn to smile at its officious and impotent attempts at the protection of truth in moral and political inquiries? The doctrine, that, under perfect freedom of discussion, falsehood would ultimately prevail, virtually implies the human faculties to be so constituted, as, all other things being the same, to cleave to error rather than to truth; in which case the pursuit of knowledge would be folly, since every step and every effort

would carry us farther from our object. But the supposition of the ultimate triumph of falsehood is a fallacy disproved by the experience of mankind. Error may subvert error, one false doctrine may supersede another, and truth may be long undiscovered, and make its way slowly against the tide of prejudice: but that it has not only the power of overcoming its antagonist in equal circumstances, but also of surmounting every intellectual obstacle, every impediment but mere brute force, is proved by the general advancement of knowledge. If we trace the history of any science, we shall find it a record of mistakes and misconceptions, a narrative of misdirected and often fruitless efforts; yet if amidst all these the science has made a progress, the struggles through which it has passed, far from evincing that the human mind is prone to error rather than to truth, furnish a decisive proof of the contrary, and an illustration of the fact, that, in the actual condition of humanity, mistakes are the necessary instruments by which truth is brought to light, or, at least, indispensable conditions of the process.

No one, perhaps, in the present day, although he might be the advocate of restraints on the discussion of theological and political topics, would be hardy enough to contest the justness of this remark, or contend for the utility of restrictions in mathematical and physical science: and yet, in this respect, all the various departments of knowledge stand on the same ground. Let those who think otherwise show us the distinctive characteristics which render it proper and expedient to shackle the discussion of particular topics, while every other subject is abandoned, without fear or precaution, alike to the conflicting play of the acutest intellects, and to the blunders of ignorance and imbecility.

What, however, we have to prove on the present occa-

sion, is not, that truth if left to its own energy will finally triumph over prevailing error, but the less questionable position, that novel errors are not capable of overturning truths already established. The exercise of authority is, of course, always in support of established opinions; and since to be justifiable it must proceed on the assumption of their freedom from error, all that is necessary for our purpose is to show, that if they are as true as they are assumed to be, they cannot be subverted by the utmost latitude of discussion.

If they are true, then is there the highest probability, that every fresh examination to which they may be subjected will terminate in placing them in clearer light; because every argument levelled against them must involve some fallacy which is liable to detection, and the exposure of which will tend to propagate and confirm them. The only cause why any opinions need to apprehend the touch of discussion is, that there is a certain process of reason by which they may be proved to be wrong, and the discovery of which may result from the conflict of arguments. The nature of this predicament, in which true opinions can never stand, and all objections to them must ever remain, constitutes of itself a sufficient barrier against the encroachments of falsehood, were there no other to be found in the fixed habits and dispositions of the community. It is a work of difficulty to overturn even established error, because the interests, passions, and prejudices of so many are engaged in its support, and long resist the strongest arguments and the clearest demonstration: why then need we fear the overthrow of established truth by the utmost license of discussion, when not only prescription, interest, prejudice, and passion, are in its favor, but the powerful alliance of reason itself?

In stating the grounds on which all restrictions must

proceed, we limited our remarks to restrictions honestly intended for the benefit of the community, because no others can be openly maintained; and whatever may be the real motives of those who impose or advocate them, the good of the public must be their ostensible aim. It is obvious, however, that restraints of this kind much more frequently owe their origin to the selfish fears and purposes of part of the community, than to just and liberal intentions with regard to the whole. Established opinions are so interwoven with the interests of individuals, that the subversion of one often threatens the ruin of the other. Hence the energy which strains every nerve in their support, and hence much of the rancor with which the slightest deviation is pursued.

SECTION VI.

ON THE FREE PUBLICATION OF OPINIONS AS AFFECTING THE PEOPLE AT LARGE.

We now come to a question naturally springing out of the present subject, and of no mean importance. It may be urged, that, granting the justness of the observations in the preceding chapter, there are other considerations of too momentous a nature to be overlooked. Free discussion may be the best means of promoting the progress of truth; but is the unbounded license of disseminating all opinions the best way of propagating truth amongst those who may be presumed, from their situation in life, to be incompetent to judge for themselves? Would it not be wise to interpose some restraint to prevent the poor and the ignorant from being deluded by falsehood?

There are several strong reasons why any restrictions, imposed with a view to guard the lower classes from error, would prove abortive, and even injurious. All restraints of this kind would imply, on the part of those who imposed them, that they themselves could infallibly determine what was true and what was false. But it is plain, as we have already remarked, that if such an assumption had always been acted upon, authority would have been frequently employed in suppressing truth and lending assistance to error; nor can we have better grounds for acting upon it now than the same strong conviction which clung to our predecessors. To see the matter in its proper light, we have only for a moment to consider what would have been the state of society in Europe, if the principle of

guarding the poor from what the established authorities regarded as error, had been always successfully enforced.

The whole experience of mankind on this subject proclaims, that regulations to keep the people from opinions which have been pronounced to be errors by fallible men, if they could accomplish their object, would prove the most effectual engines that could be devised for perpetuating ignorance and falsehood.

Were it possible, nevertheless, for any set of men to discriminate the true nature of opinions with unerring accuracy, yet, in an age of improvement and a land of liberty, they could not confine the minds of the people to those ideas which they chose to impart to them. Unless the lower classes were kept in total darkness by the most intolerable despotism, it would be impossible to prevent them from participating in the discussions of their superiors in rank and knowledge. There are a thousand channels of communication which cannot be closed, and on every controvertible subject there is a certain train of doubts, difficulties, and objections, which nothing but utter ignorance can suppress. Truths, which have been the gradual result of inquiry and induction, of suppositions disproved and mistakes rectified, cannot always be introduced into the mind without a process somewhat similar to that by which they have been originally obtained.

Since then the poorer classes cannot be brought to limit their inquiries to what their superiors choose to set before them; since doubts and difficulties will necessarily start up in their minds, it becomes very questionable whether, even on the supposition of established opinions being true, more error would not prevail under a system of restriction than under perfect freedom of inquiry. All that authority could do in regard to contrary doctrines would be to pro-

hibit their open expression or promulgation; it would have no power to extirpate them from the mind. Under a system of restraint, therefore, it is probable, that a multiplicity of errors would secretly exist; and as they would not be allowed to find public vent, they could not be refuted. They would, consequently, bid fair to have a far more durable and extensive prevalence than if they were openly expressed, and exposed to the rigorous test of general examination. It seems, indeed, an obvious if not an unavoidable policy, rather to encourage than repress the expression of dissent from established notions. A government, whose fundamental principle was the happiness of the community, would act, in this respect, like a wise teacher, who encourages his pupils to propose the doubts and objections to which the imperfection of their knowledge may have given birth, and which can be removed from their minds only when they are known. The surest way of contracting the empire of error, is to increase the general power of discerning its character. In the present stage of civilization this is, in fact, all that can be done. The days of concealment and mystery are past. There is now no resource but in a system of fairness and open dealing; no feasible mode of preserving and propagating truth but by exalting ignorance into knowledge.

The universal education of the poor, which no earthly power can prevent, although it may retard it, is loudly demanded by the united voices of the moralist and politician. But if the people are to be enlightened at all, it is unavailing and inconsistent to resort to half measures and timid expedients; to treat them at once as men and as children; to endow them with the power of thinking, and at the same time to fetter its exercise; to make an appeal to their reason, and yet to distrust its result; to give them the stomach of a lion, and feed them with the aliment of a lamb. The

promoters of the universal education of the poor ought to be aware, that they are setting in motion, or at least accelerating the action of an engine too powerful to be controlled at their pleasure, and likely to prove fatal to all those of their own systems, which rest not on the solid foundation of reality. They ought to know, that they are necessarily giving birth to a great deal of doubt and investigation; that they are undermining the power of prejudice, and the influence of mere authority and prescription; that they are creating an immense number of keen inquirers and original thinkers, whose intellectual force will be turned, in the first instance, upon those subjects which are dearest to the heart and of most importance to society.

In the further prosecution of this subject, it may be asked of the advocates of restrictive measures, by what conceivable regulations they could guard those from error, who were not able to judge for themselves, and at the same time secure the substantial advantages of unlimited discussion to the rest?

No human ingenuity could combine these two objects. No line of demarcation could be drawn between those who should be left to the operation of all arguments which could be adduced, and those whose weakness or ignorance required the paternal arm of authority to shield them from falsehood. There can be no distinction made between the rich and the poor in these cases. Not to insist upon the fact, that many in the inferior ranks are quite as competent to the examination of any question, which bears upon moral or political conduct, as many in the highest stations; it is impracticable to devise a measure which shall exclude any particular classes, and leave the right of free examination unimpaired to the rest; so that, if we were under the necessity of allowing, that some

evils might arise from admitting the poor to be a party in the examination of a subject, it might still be contended, that such evils would be wisely encountered for the sake of those inestimable advantages, which follow the progress of truth, and which can be purchased only by liberty of public discussion. It may be further urged, to show the importance of maintaining this liberty unshackled, that the intelligence of the lower classes, the diminution of ignorance and error amongst them must necessarily depend on the general progress of knowledge. While those who have the best opportunities of information, are in darkness, those, who are in inferior stations, cannot be expected to be otherwise than proportionably more so. Whatever therefore tends to keep the former from becoming enlightened (as all restrictions inevitably do) must have a corresponding effect on the latter, or, in other words, tend to keep them in that state from which it is the professed object of restrictions to preserve them.

It is necessary to recollect that the real question is, not whether it is desirable that the poorer classes, or all classes, should be preserved from error (about which there can be no dispute at this stage of our discussion), but whether it would be proper and expedient to attempt the accomplishment of that object by the interposition of authority. There are many acts which are highly injurious to society, but which we never attempt to suppress by legal enactments, because such a procedure would be either abortive or pregnant with greater evils than the evils against which it was directed. On this principle, ingratitude, cruelty, treachery, incontinence, and a number of other vices, are not touched by the laws, but left to the natural discouragements imposed by the moral sentiments of the community. On the same grounds, although erroneous opinions are injurious to

society, and it would be an important benefit if their dissemination could be prevented, yet it would be inexpedient to endeavor to accomplish that object by legal restrictions. The attempt would be impolitic, because, as we have already shown, not only is it impossible to discriminate infallibly what is true from what is false, so as to avoid suppressing truth and propagating falsehood; but all restraints would be likely to defeat their own ends, or at all events would never be effectual unless pushed to the extreme of tyranny, and could not be imposed so as accomplish their object without impeding the progress of knowledge.

But the people are not left to the inundation of falsehood without a remedy or protection. Restraints on the promulgation of opinions, even if they were proper and expedient on the supposition of their efficacy, and of the infallibility of those who imposed them, seem peculiarly unnecessary, since there is always a powerful means of counteracting what we conceive to be errors. Fallacies may be exposed, misstatements detected, absurdities ridiculed. These are the natural and appropriate modes of repression; and while they must be ultimately successful amongst all classes of people, unless the human mind is better adapted to the reception of falsehood than of truth (in which case the pursuit of knowledge would be folly), they possess the additional recommendation of contributing to the detection of those fallacies which have mingled themselves with the sentiments of the most accurate judges. Here we have a legitimate method of disseminating our tenets, in which we may indulge without restraint, assured that whether right or wrong we shall contribute to the ultimate triumph of truth. In detecting falsehood and exposing it to general observation, we are far more effectually guarding all ranks from its influence,

than by mysterious reserve and timorous precautions, which are always suspected of being employed in the support of opinions not capable of standing by their own strength.*

* See Note I.

SECTION VII.

ON THE ULTIMATE INEFFICACY OF RESTRAINTS ON THE PUBLICATION OF OPINIONS, AND THEIR BAD EFFECTS IN DISTURBING THE NATURAL COURSE OF IMPROVEMENT.

In the present state of the world, it is questionable, whether the progress of opinion can be much retarded by restraint and persecution; and it is certain, that it cannot be stopped. Where the arts and sciences are cultivated, and the press is in operation, restrictions on particular subjects must be in a great measure inefficacious, except in producing irritation and violence. The various branches of knowledge are so intimately connected, that it is a vain attempt to shackle any of them while the rest are at liberty. The general improvement of science will inevitably throw light on any prohibited subjects, and suggest conclusions with regard to them which no authority can preclude from universal adoption.

Even if restraints partially succeed in their object, they will only retard the consummation, which they cannot prevent; they will only detain the community longer amidst that struggle of truth and falsehood, which must inevitably take place. Since there is a sort of regular process, which must be gone through, a course of doubts, and difficulties, and objections, before any disputable truth can be firmly settled in the minds of thinking men; the sooner this is accomplished the better; the sooner the objections and their answers, the difficulties and their solutions, are put on record, the greater the number of people who will be saved from uncertainty and from the trouble of winding through all the intricacies of the dispute. The

interference of power cannot obviate this necessity, nor can it prevent the operation of those general causes, which are constantly at work on the understandings of men, and produce certain opinions in certain states of society and stages of civilization. The utmost, then, that authority can do, is to retard the action of these general causes, to prolong the period of hesitation and uncertainty, and to disturb the natural progress of human improvement. It even sometimes happens (as we have already had occasion to notice), that restrictive measures defeat their own object, and accelerate the event they are intended to arrest or counteract. The mere attempt to suppress a doctrine has often been found to disseminate it more widely. There is a charm in secrecy, which often attracts the public mind to proscribed opinions. The curiosity roused by their being prohibited, a repugnance to oppression, and undefined suspicion, or tacit inference, that what requires the arm of power to suppress it must have some strong claims to credence, and various other circumstances, draw the attention of numbers, in whose eyes the matter in controversy, had it been freely discussed, would have been totally destitute of interest. Whatever is the severity of the law, some bold spirit every now and then sets it at defiance, and by so doing spreads the obnoxious doctrine far more rapidly than it would have diffused itself had it been left unmolested.

In proportion to the inefficacy of restraints on the publication of opinions, the objections which we have brought against them, would, of course, be weakened or removed. If they did not succeed in their object, they would be no impediment to the progress of truth; but although they should be ultimately ineffectual, they would still beget positive evils, by disturbing the natural course of improvement. In a country, or community, where no such re-

straints existed, it is obvious that no changes of opinion could well be sudden. Truth, at the best, makes but slow advances. Its light is at first confined to men of high station, learning, and abilities, and gradually spreads down to the other classes of society. The reluctance of the human mind to receive ideas contrary to its usual habits of thinking would be a sufficient security from violent transitions, did we not already possess another in the slowness with which the understanding makes its discoveries. Arguments, by which prescriptive error is overturned, however plain and forcible they may be, are found out with difficulty, and in the first instance can be entered into only by enlarged and liberal minds, by whom they are subsequently familiarized and disseminated to others.

Now all restraints on the free examination of any subject are an interference with the natural and regular process here described, and produce mischievous irregularities. The gradual progress of opinion cannot be stopped, but it is interrupted. We no longer find it so insensibly progressive, that we can hardly mark the change but by comparing two distant periods. Under a system of restraint and coercion, we see apparently sudden revolutions in public sentiment. Opinions are cherished and spread, in the secrecy of fear, till the ardor with which they are entertained can no longer be repressed, and bursts forth into outrage and disorder. The passions become exasperated; the natural sense of injustice, which men will deeply feel as long as the world lasts at the proscription or persecution of opinions, is roused into action, and a zeal is kindled for the propagation of doctrines, endeared to the heart by obloquy and suffering.

Such ebullitions are to be feared only where the natural operation of inquiry has been obstructed. As in the

physical so in the moral world, it is repression which produces violence. Public opinion resembles the vapor, which in the open air is as harmless as the breeze, but which may be compressed into an element of tremendous power. When novel doctrines are kept down by force, they naturally resort to force to free themselves from restraints. Their advocates would seldom pursue violent measures, if such measures had not been first directed against them. What partly contributes to this violence is the effect produced by restraint on the moral qualities of men's minds. Compulsory silence, the necessity of confining to his own breast ardently cherished opinions, can never have a good influence on the character of any one. It has a tendency to make men morose and hypocritical, discontented and designing, and ready to risk much in order to rid themselves of their trammels; while the liberty of uttering opinions, without obloquy and punishment, promotes satisfaction of mind and sincerity of conduct.

If these representations are correct, they distinctly mark out the course of enlightened policy. Whether established opinions are false or true, it is alike the interest of the community, that investigation should be unrestrained; in order that, if false, they may be discarded, and, if true, rendered conspicuous to all. The only way of fully attaining the benefits of truth is to suffer opinions to maintain themselves against attack, or fall in the contest. The terrors of the law are wretched replies to argument, disgraceful to a good, and feeble auxiliaries to a bad cause. If there was any fixed and unquestionable standard by which the validity of opinions could be tried, there might be some sense, and some utility in checking the extravagances of opinion by legal interference; but since there is no other standard than the general reason

of mankind, discussion is the only method of trying the correctness of all doctrines whatever; and it is the highest presumption in any man, or any body of men, to erect their own tenets into a criterion of truth, and overwhelm dissent and opposition by penal inflictions. Such conduct can proceed on no principle, which would not justify all the persecutions, that disgrace the page of ecclesiastical history. Let established opinions be defended with the utmost power of reason, let the learning of schools and colleges be brought to their support, let elegance and taste display them in their most enchanting colors, let no labor, no expense, no arguments, no fascination be spared in upholding their authority; but in the name of humanity resort not to the aid of the pillory and the dungeon. When they cannot be maintained by knowledge and reason, it will surely be time to suspect that judicial severities will be but a feeble protection.

Whoever has attentively meditated on the progress of the human race cannot fail to discern, that there is now a spirit of inquiry amongst men, which nothing can stop, or even materially control. Reproach and obloquy, threats and persecution, will be vain. They may embitter opposition, and engender violence, but they cannot abate the keenness of research. There is a silent march of thought, which no power can arrest, and which it is not difficult to foresee will be marked by important events. Mankind were never before in the situation in which they now stand. The press has been operating upon them for several centuries, with an influence scarcely perceptible at its commencement, but daily becoming more palpable, and acquiring accelerated force. It is rousing the intellect of nations, and happy will it be for them if there be no rash interference with the natural progress of

knowledge; and if, by a judicious and gradual adaptation of their institutions to the inevitable changes of opinion, they are saved from those convulsions, which the pride, prejudices, and obstinacy of a few may occasion to the whole.*

* See Note K.

MISCELLANEOUS ESSAYS.

ESSAY III.

ON FACTS AND INFERENCES.

Dr. Reid, in that part of his Essays on the Intellectual Powers where he treats of the supposed fallacy of the senses, points out an important distinction between what our senses actually testify, and the conclusions which we draw from their testimony.

'Many things,' says he, 'called deceptions of the senses, are only conclusions rashly drawn from the testimony of the senses. In these cases the testimony of the senses is true, but we rashly draw a conclusion from it which does not necessarily follow. We are disposed to impute our errors rather to false information than to inconclusive reasoning, and to blame our senses for the wrong conclusions we draw from their testimony.

'Thus,' he continues, 'when a man has taken a counterfeit guinea for a true one, he says his senses deceived him; but he lays the blame where it ought not to be laid; for we must ask him, Did your senses give a false testimony of the color, or of the figure, or of the impression? No. But this is all that they testified, and this they testified truly; from these premises you concluded that it was a true guinea, but this conclusion does not follow; you erred, therefore, not by relying upon the

testimony of sense, but by judging rashly from its testimony.*

This confounding of facts and inferences, so acutely exposed by Dr. Reid, is not, however confined to cases in which we have the testimony of our own senses. The remark may be extended to every department of knowledge, which depends on observation, for in all we are continually liable to the same mistake. If we attend to the understandings of the majority of mankind, we shall discover an utter confusion in this respect. Their opinions are a confused and indiscriminate mass, in which facts and inferences, realities and suppositions, are blended together, and conceived, not only as of equal authority, but as possessing the same character. In other words, inferences, or assumptions from facts, are regarded as forming part of the facts. This is particularly observable with regard to the relation of cause and effect. That one thing is the cause of another may be either actually witnessed, or merely inferred; the connection of two events may be, to us, either a fact, or a conclusion deduced from appearances; a difference which may be easily illustrated. For this purpose, let us suppose the case of a stone falling from a rock, and crushing a flower at its base. To an eye-witness, it would be a fact, and not an inference, that the falling of the stone was the cause of the injury sustained by the flower. But suppose a man passed by, after the rock had fallen, and, perceiving a flower crushed and a stone near it which appeared to be a fragment recently disjoined from the cliffs above, pronounced that the flower had been crushed by the stone, he would not be stating a fact but making an inference. The man who saw the piece of rock fall upon the flower,

* Essays on the Intellectual Powers, p. 291.

and crush it, could not be mistaken; but he who inferred the same thing from the appearance of the cliffs and the proximity of the stone, might be wrong, because the flower might possibly have been crushed in some other manner. There would evidently be an opening for error. It would be possible, for instance, although it might be highly improbable, that some person had purposely taken off a piece from the rock, and, after crushing the flower with his foot, had laid the stone by its side, in order to mislead any body that came after him. If we analyze this case, and separate the facts from the inferences, we shall find the whole of the facts to be these: that a flower was crushed, that a stone lay by it, and that the cliffs above exhibited a certain peculiar appearance. The inferences from these facts are, that the stone fell from the cliffs and crushed the flower in its descent. By this separation of facts and inferences, we clearly see where there is perfect certainty, and where there is a possibility of error.

There cannot be a better illustration of the mistakes into which a neglect of this distinction leads, than the general opinion of the ignorant part of mankind, that the sun revolves round the earth, which is manifestly an inference drawn from observing that the earth and the sun change their relative position. This is the whole of the fact: that the sun makes a revolution round the earth is an inference to account for the phenomenon; yet so immediately is this inference suggested, so closely does it follow on appearances, that it is almost universally received as a matter of fact; and a man might as well attempt to dislodge the sun from his position as to displace the opinion from the mind of one who had grown up to maturity in the belief of it. He would probably ask, if you wished to persuade him that he could not see, or whether it was

likely that he could acquiesce in your arguments rather than the evidence of his senses.

It is this blending of facts and inferences, which is at the bottom of the objections of mere matter-of-fact men to the conclusions of political economy, and of the assumptions continually made with regard to that science, that theory and experience are at war. We may discern it in the common prejudices against machinery for superseding manual labor. A matter-of-fact man, as soon as he sees a number of workmen destitute of employment, from the fluctuations incident to commerce, begins to lament, that, in modern times, so much machinery should be employed, when so many laborers are idle, and regards it as an indisputable fact, that the machinery has occasioned the mischief. 'Do we not see,' exclaim persons of this class, 'that these machines perform operations that would require hundreds of human beings, and thereby deprive them of employment? Is it not clear, that if no machines existed, these idle hands would be set to work; and would you persuade us not to believe our own eyes?' The only facts in this case, however, are, that the machinery is in operation, and the men are destitute of employment. That one is the cause of the other (which may or may not be true), is an inference to account for the state of affairs; and an inference which, though it may sometimes be just, on the first introduction of machinery, is in general at variance with the clearest principles of political science.

The utility of the distinction here pointed out is very perceptible in all questions of national policy. In public affairs there is commonly such a multiplicity of principles in operation, so many concurring and counteracting circumstances, such an intermixture of design and accident, that the utmost caution is necessary in referring events to

their origin; while in no subject of human speculation, perhaps, is there a greater confusion of realities and assumptions. It is sufficient for the majority of political reasoners, that two events are coexistent or consecutive. To their conception it immediately becomes a fact, that one is the cause of the other. They see a minister in office, or an abuse in existence, or a factious demagogue at work, during the prevalence of national distress or disorder; and by a compendious logic they identify the minister, or the abuse, or the demagogue with the evil, and make it an article in their creed, that the removal of one would be the removal of both. The coexistence, however, of these two things is not sufficient to establish their connection, and all beyond their coexistence is inferential, and requires to be supported by proof.

We cannot more aptly elucidate this part of our subject, than by referring to the discussion of such questions as the policy of educating the poor. To prove the advantages of this measure, an advocate for the diffusion of knowledge generally brings an instance of some country where education has extensively prevailed through all ranks, and which has at the same time been distinguished for moral excellence. This is called an appeal to facts; but it is obvious, that the only facts are the coexistence of a system of education with virtuous conduct, and that the main force of the arguments lies, not in a fact, but in an inference, that one is the cause of the other. This inference may be highly probable, but it requires to be proved itself before it can be admitted as a positive proof of any thing else.* The same observation applies to the arguments of those speculators, who begin to doubt the advantages of

*It may be added, that the proofs necessary to establish the *inference* are altogether different from the proofs of the *facts themselves*.

the plan of education lately pursued with the poor in England, on the ground that immorality appears to increase. Assuming it to be true, that immorality has increased since the introduction of the plan, yet this by no means establishes it as a fact, that one has been the effect of the other. A careful induction of circumstances, or a clear process of reasoning from general principles, would be necessary to prove such a connection between them.

The tendency to confound these two different things is not the least remarkable in the practice of medicine. It extensively pervades the pretended knowledge of ignorant practitioners, and the empiricism of people in all ranks of life. If any particular change ensues after taking a drug, the drug is at once assumed to be the cause of the change; it is immediately set down as an indisputable fact, that such a medicine is a certain remedy for such a complaint. It is in reality, however, one of the most delicate tasks, and forms one of the greatest difficulties of medical practice, to discriminate, amidst a complication of circumstances preceding any effect, that particular circumstance which has occasioned it. In no cases, perhaps, are men more liable to err than these; in none is patient investigation less attended to, or more necessary, and precipitancy of inference more carefully to be avoided. In none is it of more importance to make the distinction, which it has been the object of this essay to point out.

These remarks serve to show, what may at first sight appear paradoxical, that those men, who are generally designated as practical and experienced, have often as much of the hypothetical interwoven in their opinions as the most speculative theorists. Half of their facts are mere inferences, rashly and erroneously drawn. They may have no systematic hypotheses in their minds, but they are full of assumptions without being aware of it.

It is impossible, that men should witness simultaneous or consecutive events without connecting them in their imaginations as causes and effects. There is a continual propensity in the human mind to establish these relations amongst the phenomena subjected to its observation, and to consider them as possessing the character of facts. But in doing this there is great liability to error, and the opinions of a man, who has formed them from what Lord Bacon calls 'mera palpatio,' purely from what he has come in personal contact with, cannot but abound with rash and fallacious conclusions, for which he fancies himself to have the authority of his own senses, or of indisputable experience.

ESSAY IV.

ON THE INFLUENCE OF REASON ON THE FEELINGS.

Some philosophers have proposed as a curious subject of investigation, the mutual influence of the mind and the body, and the laws which regulate their connection. It would not perhaps be less curious, though it would be far more difficult, to trace the influence of the sensitive and intellectual parts of our nature upon each other. The understanding is affected in various ways by the feelings and passions; and on the other hand, the state of the passions greatly depends on the combination of ideas before the mind, or, in other words, on the state of the intellect. To investigate all the laws of this reciprocal action would require powers of close observation and acute analysis, greater than we could hope to bring to the task. In a former essay we touched upon the subject, in attempting to explain the influence which the passions exert on the judgments of the understanding; and we shall now offer a few remarks on the influence which the conclusions of our reason exert on the passions.

Our speculative conclusions, it will be immediately acknowledged, have not always complete power over our feelings; or, in other words, our feelings do not invariably conform to the previous convictions of our judgment. The opinion, that we ought to feel in a certain manner on a certain occasion, is often ineffectual in producing the

proper emotion. Our view of the impropriety and absurdity of a passion does not allay it. A man, for example, may feel painfully vexed at some trivial circumstance, and although he is sensible of the folly of suffering his tranquillity to be disturbed by a thing of no importance, yet this consideration fails to restore the tone of his mind, and it would probably be incapable of preventing the same emotion on a recurrence of the same circumstances. Even the philosopher, who from the heights of contemplation from the 'edita doctrinâ sapientum templa serena,' looks down on the vain pursuits of his fellow-creatures, and distinctly sees their worthlessness, and the folly of the passions which they engender, is unable to resist the domination of the same influences when he descends from his elevation and mingles with the crowd.

This insubordination of the sensitive to the intellectual part of our nature, is more particularly remarkable in those associations of thought and feeling, which we have acquired in early life. Before we have well emerged from infancy, our moral and intellectual constitution has been so far formed, that certain ideas or circumstances awaken peculiar emotions in the breast, with almost as much precision as the touch of the finger elicits from the keys of a harpsichord their respective musical notes. In the progress of life, however, we discover that some of these feelings are improper and inappropriate to the occasions on which they arise; and yet, even after this discovery, they still beset us whenever the same occasions recur. Present objects awaken our dormant associations, and the cool conclusions of our reason sink forgotten from the mind. The prejudices of the nursery have been commonly adduced in illustration of this principle of our mental constitution. Few persons (to take a trite example), who have been taught in their infancy to dread the

appearance of ghosts in the dark, are enabled so entirely to shake off their early associations as, at all times and in all places, to feel perfectly free from apprehension in the dead of night, however strong their conviction may be of the absurdity of their fears.

We may observe the like pertinacious adherence of feelings, at variance with our reason, in those who are subject to the passion of *mauvaise honte*. To this passion some are doubtless constitutionally more prone than others; but the strength of it, and the occasions on which it is evinced, depend greatly on the associations of ideas and feelings formed in early life. If a child is brought up, for instance, in a family where receiving and paying visits are regarded as extraordinary events, and attended by formality and constraint of manner, company becomes formidable to his imagination; and it will require frequent intercourse with society in after-life to overcome the effects of such an impression. Notwithstanding the clearest perception of the absurdity of feeling embarrassed before his fellow-creatures, he will often find himself disconcerted in their presence, and thrown into confusion by trifles which his good sense thoroughly despises. In the same manner, an involuntary deference for rank may be observed amidst the strongest conviction of the emptiness of aristocratical distinctions, and the most decided republican principles. The lingering spirit of the feudal system, and the general forms and institutions of society in Europe, have a tendency to infuse into the minds of certain classes such feelings of respect for the greatness of high life, as, when they find themselves in its presence, sometimes overpower the opposite influence of mature opinions.* It is the force of such impressions

*The powerful effect of such associations is forcibly depicted by Madame de Staël, in the following passage of her posthumous work,

that produces so much awkwardness in the manners of our peasantry, and it is freedom from them that often gives an air of dignity to the deportment of the savage.

In religion, the strong power of associations in opposition to the convictions of the understanding, is peculiarly worthy of notice, especially in the case of changes from a superstitious to a more rational and liberal creed. The force of a man's education has perhaps long held him in bondage, and his whole feelings have become interwoven with the tenets of his sect. By the enlargement of his knowledge, however, he discovers his early opinions to be erroneous; different conclusions force themselves on his understanding, and his faith undergoes a radical alteration. Yet his former feelings still cling to his mind. A long time must often elapse before he can cast off the authority of his old prepossessions. It is not always that the mind can keep itself at a proper elevation for viewing such subjects in a clear light; and till it has acquired the power of retaining its vantage-ground, it may be reduced to its former state by the influence of vivid recollections, customary circumstances, general opinion, or any thing which may occasionally overpower its vigor, or dim its perspica-

where she exhibits the sentiments of the lower classes towards the Aristocracy during the French Revolution: —

'One would have said that nobody in France could look at a man of consequence, that no member of the *Tiers Etat* could approach a person belonging to the court, without feeling himself in subjection. Such are the melancholy effects of arbitrary government, and of too exclusive distinctions of rank! The animadversions of the lower orders on the aristocratic body have not the effect of destroying its ascendancy, even over those by whom it is hated; the inferior classes, in the sequel, inflicted death on their former masters, as the only method of ceasing to obey them.' — *Considerations on the Principal Events of the French Revolution*, vol. i, page 348 (English Translation).

city. Thus men, who have rejected vulgar creeds in the days of health and prosperity, manfully opposing their clear and comprehensive views to prevailing superstitions, have sometimes exhibited the melancholy spectacle of again stooping to their shackles in the hour of sickness, and at the approach of death; not because their understandings were convinced of error by any fresh light, but because they were unable to keep their rational conclusions steadily in view; because that intellectual strength, which repelled absurd dogmas, had sunk beneath the pressure of disease, or the fears of nature, and left the defenceless spirit to the predominance of early associations, and to the inroads of superstitious terror. Such men are replunged into their old prejudices, exactly in the same way as he, who has thrown off the superstitions of the nursery, is overpowered, as he passes through a churchyard at midnight, by his infantile associations.*

It has been somewhere remarked, that in the soaring of a bird, there is a contest between its muscular power and the force of gravitation; and that, although the former always overcomes the latter, when the bird chooses to exert it, yet the force of gravity is sure to prevail in the end, and bring the wearied pinions to the ground. Thus it is with associations, which have laid firm hold of the mind in early youth, which have mixed themselves with every incident, and wound themselves round every object. The mind may frequently rise above them, discard them, despise them, and leave them at an infinite distance; but it is still held by the fine and invisible attraction of its antiquated feelings and opinions, which, whenever its vigor relaxes, draws it back into the limits from which it had burst away in the plenitude of its powers.

* See Note L.

It is worthy of remark, that there are moments when old associations are revived with peculiar vividness by very trivial circumstances. A noble author has described such moments with his usual felicity, in the two following stanzas. What he so happily says of sorrowful emotions may be extended, with little qualification, to almost every passion of the human breast.

'But ever and anon of griefs subdued
There comes a token like a scorpion's sting,
Scarce seen, but with fresh bitterness imbued;
And slight withal may be the things which bring
Back on the heart the weight which it would fling
Aside for ever: it may be a sound —
A tone of music — summer's eve — or spring,
A flower — the wind — the ocean — which shall wound,
Striking the electric chain wherewith we are darkly bound;

And how, and why we know not, nor can trace
Home to its cloud this lightning of the mind,
But feel the shock renewed, nor can efface
The blight and blackening which it leaves behind,
Which out of things familiar, undesigned,
When least we deem of such, calls up to view
The spectres whom no exorcism can bind,
The cold — the changed — perchance the dead — anew,
The mourned, the loved, the lost — too many! — yet how few!' *

It is in general very difficult, and even impracticable, to recall at will the peculiar emotions which have affected us at some distant period of life; because, though we may remember the circumstances wherein we were placed, they no longer operate on our sensibility in the same way. We may recollect our joy or our sorrow, but we cannot reproduce in ourselves the same affections. What, how-

*_Childe Harold_, canto iv.

ever, we are unable purposely to effect, is frequently accomplished by a few touches on the harpsichord, by the fragrance of a flower, or the song of a bird. These simple instruments have the power of awakening emotions which have been dormant for years, and calling up the images, the impressions, the associations of some almost forgotten moment of past life, with all the vividness which they originally possessed. Our recollection seizes from oblivion the very hue which every thing then wore around us. Our heart catches the very tone which then impressed it. A sudden gleam of renovated feeling rescues one spot from the surrounding darkness of the past.

To return from this digression: the effect, which we before attempted to describe, seems to spring from the power of the passion to engross and concentrate our attention to its objects, and by necessary consequence to withdraw it from all others. The passion is strongly associated with certain ideas or circumstances; when those ideas or circumstances are presented to the mind the passion is roused, and when roused absorbs the attention, to the inevitable exclusion of sober and rational views.*

Has reason then no power whatever in these and simi-

* The effect of prevailing passion (however excited) is not ill described by the pen of a celebrated female writer of the present day: —

'Under the influence of any passion, the perception of pain and pleasure alters as much as the perceptions of a person in a fever vary from those of the same man in sound health. The whole scale of individual happiness, as well as of general good and evil, virtue and vice, is often disturbed at the very rising of the passion, and totally overthrown in the hurricane of the soul. Then, in the most perilous and critical moments, the conviction of the understanding is, if not reversed, suspended. Those, who have lived long in the world, and who have seen examples of these truths, feel that these are not mere words.' — *Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth,* vol. ii. p. 403.

lar cases? Is it of no use to attain clear and rational convictions, since they thus desert us in the hour when we most require their assistance? These questions are important, and we will venture a few remarks by way of reply to them.

It is evident, in the first place, that we are only occasionally liable to those relapses in which the feelings overpower the judgment; it is only when our understanding is enfeebled and its views beclouded, or when we are placed within the sphere of some strong exciting cause. During the greatest part of our time, our deliberate convictions will necessarily regulate our feelings and our actions. A man convinced of the absurdity of a belief in spectral appearances will feel and act throughout the day, and commonly in the night, agreeably to that conviction; it can only be under some striking circumstances that his old associations will predominate. In the same way, an individual, who feels more deference perhaps in the personal presence of a great man than he chooses to acknowledge, may at other periods be perfectly independent of him, and altogether uninfluenced by any such emotion. The utility, therefore, of acquiring just views, will not be materially impaired by the difficulty of conforming our emotions to them on particular occasions. And it may be further remarked, that the value of such views lies, not so much in the efficacy of their counteraction during the access of any passion, as in enabling us to avoid the occasions on which it will be improperly excited; and in rendering the mind less liable to be thrown into that state, or to have its sensibilities improperly awakened. The fear of nocturnal apparitions, it is obvious, would not be so easily roused in one who had freed himself from the prejudices of the nursery, although not altogether from the

power of the associations there formed, as in one whose belief and associations on that subject were in harmony.

But the conclusions of our reason have not only the power of rendering the mind less susceptible of emotions when brought within the sphere of the exciting cause, less liable to have opposite associations roused, they have sometimes a still farther effect. A conviction may be so strongly wrought into the understanding, so powerfully impressed on the imagination, as entirely to subvert former associations. Clear and comprehensive views, habitually entertained, may completely subdue the insubordination of the sensitive part of our nature; and so effectually dissolve the combinations of feeling formed in early life, as to reduce them to mere objects of cool reminiscence. The conclusions of our reason may, in time, be so strongly associated with the objects as to be suggested by them more readily than the feelings with which those objects were so intimately blended. This, however, must be the work of time, the gradual effect of habitual thought. In the endeavor so to discipline his mind, a man may expect to be repeatedly baffled, but he must still return to his purpose; he must keep his dispassionate conclusions steadily before him, till they come to form part of the familiar views of his understanding, and are interwoven with his habitual feelings. Success may follow such an attempt on the part of the philosopher, and indeed some degree of the effect will necessarily attend every acquisition of sound knowledge; but in general the erroneous associations of mankind will be found of too inveterate a nature to be thoroughly eradicated, and will maintain an occasional ascendency amidst all the advances of truth and the triumphs of reason.

ESSAY V.

ON INATTENTION TO THE DEPENDENCE OF CAUSES AND EFFECTS IN MORAL CONDUCT.

PART I.

In the physical world, to whatever part we turn our eyes, we are presented with a regular succession of causes and effects. By gradual, and almost imperceptible experience, man learns to accommodate his actions to the fixed laws and ascertainable properties of matter; and by observing the conjunction and succession of phenomena, he acquires the power of foreseeing events in their causes. Nor is he a mere spectator of the operations of nature, but in many cases he interferes with her processes, and after gathering her laws from observation, he employs their agency in the production of novel results for the accomplishment of his purposes. By observing the train of physical events, which lie beyond his control, he can frequently regulate his actions in such a manner as to avoid hurtful, and derive advantage from beneficial effects, which he cannot prevent or produce: and where he is enabled actively to interfere with her processes he can do more, he can arrest or avert evils, and create positive benefits.

What a man can do in the material, he may also accomplish in a similar manner in the moral world. The

moral and intellectual qualities of the human race present an equal field for observation and sagacity. Certain actions lead to certain results, or are means connected with certain ends; and by observing the faculties and conduct of himself and others, he may trace the connections thus subsisting between them. If he desires a good, depending on the state of his own mind, or of the minds of his fellow-creatures, he must find out and employ the means with which it is conjoined; if he wishes to shun an evil of the same nature, he must ascertain and avoid the actions of which it is the effect. The happiness of his life will thus essentially depend on a strict attention to the tendencies and consequences of human actions. Many of the practical errors of mankind seem to spring from a heedlessness of these tendencies; from an ignorance or misconception of the course of events, or, in other words, from a wrong or inadequate apprehension of the dependence of causes and effects. In their plans, pursuits, and general conduct they too often betray a negligence of consequences, a hope against experience, a defiance of probabilities, a vagueness of anticipation, which looks for results where no proper means have been employed to produce them; their actions frequently seem to indicate a blind expectation that the order of nature will be violated in their favor, and that, amidst the apparently irregular incidents and fortuitous vicissitudes of the world, they as individuals will escape the common lot, and prove exceptions to general rules. All this principally arises from the want of a little vigorous attention, and close reasoning. Nothing, perhaps, gives its possessor such a decided superiority over the multitude as the power of clearly tracing the consequences of actions, the concatenation of mental causes and effects, and the adaptation of moral means to ends. It is a sagacity of the utmost importance in the conduct of life.

The errors, which have been adverted to, manifest themselves in various ways. The vague expectation of gaining advantages without employing proper means, may be seen in those who are perpetually in search of short and easy roads to knowledge; flattering themselves, that by the indolent perusal of abridgments and compendiums, or the sacrifice of an occasional hour at a popular lecture, they will, without much application, imbibe that learning, which they see confers so much distinction on others. They forget, that, from the very nature of the case, science cannot be obtained without labor; that ideas must be frequently presented to the mind before they become familiar to it; that the faculties must be vigorously exerted to possess much efficiency; that skill is the effect of habit; and that habit is acquired by the frequent repetition of the same act. Application is the only means of securing the end at which they aim; and they may rest assured, that all schemes to put them into possession of intellectual treasures, without any regular or strenuous efforts on their part, all promises to insinuate learning into their minds at so small an expense of time and labor that they shall scarcely be sensible of the process, are mere delusions, which can terminate in nothing but disappointment and mortification. It cannot be too deeply impressed on the mind, that application is the price to be paid for mental acquisitions, and that it is as absurd to expect them without it, as to hope for a harvest where we have not sown the seed.

As men often deceive themselves with the hope of acquiring knowledge without application, so they calculate on acquiring wealth without industry and economy, and repine that another should bear away the prize which they have made no effort to secure. Or, perhaps, impatient of this slow though certain process, they attempt to seize the

end by some extraordinary means, and carry by a single stroke what humbler individuals are content to win by regular and tedious approaches. They see the schemes of other adventurers continually failing, yet they press forward in the same course, in defiance of probability, and in the hope of proving singular exceptions to the general doom. Their bold speculations, it is true, may sometimes succeed, but they usually terminate in ruin. Disaster is the highly probable issue, and their certain consequence is a state of anxiety and suspense for which no success can atone.

But the most important mistakes of the class under consideration are those into which men fall in their moral conduct. Misery in one shape or other is the inevitable consequence of all vice; and a man can scarcely be under a greater delusion than to suppose, that he can in any instance add to his happiness by a sacrifice of principle. Yet, from the want of a clear perception of the tendencies of actions, it is too often assumed, that vice would be pleasant enough were it not forbidden; and many a one indulges his guilty passions because he knows the pleasure to be certain, while the punishment, he flatters himself, is only contingent. Every departure from virtue, however, draws after it a train of evils, which no art can escape. The ruin of health is the consequence of intemperance and debauchery, the contempt and mistrust of mankind follow upon deceit and dishonesty, and all other deviations from moral rectitude are attended by their respective evil effects. Some of these consequences are certain and uniform, and if others do not invariably follow, they ought to be considered in practice as inevitable from the rarity of the anomalous instances. Between acting against possibility, and against a high degree of probability, there is little difference in point of wisdom. General rules will

fail, or appear unnecessary, in particular instances; but as these instances cannot be foreseen, and are few in number, he who wishes to secure the end which the general rule has in view must observe it, and would be guilty of folly to speculate on its exceptions. If a man wishes to be a long liver, he must adopt habits of sobriety and temperance, as the most likely way of obtaining his purpose, notwithstanding the instances of a few individuals who have reached a good old age in direct violation of this precept. Men should recollect, too, before cheating themselves into the hope of impunity in vice, that however they may escape some of the peculiar effects, they can have no security against its general consequences. All vices are accompanied by self-degradation, as the substance by the shadow; by a deterioration of character fraught with incalculable mischief to our future peace; by the contempt, suspicion, or indignation of our fellow-creatures on their discovery; and whether discovered or undiscovered, they are pursued by that secret uneasiness, which, by the constitution of our nature, is the doom of guilt, however successful, or however concealed. A man may, indeed, proceed for a time in the career of iniquity, with a seeming carelessness, and enjoyment, and obduracy of conscience; but as long as the human mind retains its present structure, he can never be sure that the next moment will not plunge him into the acutest agonies of remorse.

Virtuous actions, and virtuous qualities, on the contrary, may be regarded as the necessary, or most likely means to secure certain good ends; as roads terminating in pleasant places. Thus honesty is the means of inspiring confidence, veracity of obtaining credit for what we say, and temperance of preserving health. If we would be esteemed, loved, and confided in, we must evince quali-

ties which are estimable, amiable, and calculated to attract confidence. The error of many consists in expecting to arrive at the place without travelling the road. They imagine that they can retain health of body and peace of mind amidst sensuality, cruelty, and injustice, and calculate on the respect of their neighbors in the face of actions almost beneath contempt. It would be as rational to form expectations of reaching London by pursuing a northerly route from Edinburgh, or of prolonging life by poisoned nutriment.

'Nor let any man suppose that he can reap the advantages of virtue by hypocritical pretension. There is a consistency of conduct which a hypocrite can scarcely maintain; and even if he could secure some of the particular ends which virtuous qualities are the means of gaining, there is a general result in serenity of mind, purity of taste, and elevation of character, which lies infinitely beyond his reach.

These errors, this disregard of consequences, and irrational expectation of advantages, without adopting appropriate measures to obtain them, may be particularly observed to prevail in domestic life. Of the miscalculation, that we shall be loved and respected without evincing amiable and estimable qualities, we may there see abundant instances. Parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, reciprocally complain of each other's deficiency of affection, and think it hard, that the tie of relationship should not secure invariable kindness and indestructible love. They expect some secret influence of blood, some physical sympathy, some natural attraction, to retain the affection of their relatives, without any solicitude on their part to cherish or confirm it. They forget, that man is so constituted as to love only what in some way or other, directly or indirectly, imme-

diately or remotely, gives him pleasure; that even natural affection is the result of pleasurable associations in his mind, or at least may be overcome by associations of an opposite character, and that the sure way to make themselves beloved is to display amiable qualities to those whose regard they wish to obtain. If our friends appear to look upon us with little interest, if our arrival is seen without pleasure, and our departure without regret, instead of charging them with a deficiency of feeling, we should turn our scrutiny upon ourselves. The well-directed eye of self-examination might probably find out, that their indifference arises from a want on our part of those qualities which are requisite to inspire affection; that it is the natural and necessary consequence of our own character and deportment. It is a folly to flatter ourselves, that our estimation, either in the circle of our friends or in the world at large, will not take its color from the nature of our conduct. There is scarcely one of our actions, our habits, or our expressions, which may not have its share in that complex feeling with which we are regarded by others.

It is true that all the pleasurable associations, formed with regard to each other in the minds of those who are connected by blood, do not depend on the personal character of their object, and that some of them can scarcely be eradicated by any possible errors of conduct. A mother's love is the result of an extensive combination of ideas and feelings, in which, for a long time, the moral and mental qualities of her child can have little share; but even her affection, supported as it is by all the strength of such associations, may be weakened, if not destroyed, by the ill-temper, ingratitude, or worthlessness of her offspring. The affection subsisting between other relatives must of course be far more liable to be impaired

by similar causes, and must chiefly depend for its continuance on personal character. As vicious qualities may prove too strong for natural affection, so, on the other hand, amiable qualities are frequently found to inspire love, even under circumstances of a very contrary tendency; as may be seen in the attachment sometimes evinced by beautiful women to men of ugly features or deformed persons. To see the same countenance, however defective in form, constantly preserving an expression of tenderness amidst all the cares and disappointments of life, to hear language of uniform kindness, and be the object of nameless acts of regard, can hardly fail, whatever other circumstances may operate, to beget feelings of reciprocal affection.

PART II.

While it will be found that many circumstances, in every man's condition, are exactly such as might be expected to result from the qualities of his mind, and the tenor of his conduct, it must not be overlooked, that there are many others over which he has no control. Human life is a voyage, in which he can choose neither the vessel nor the weather, although much may be done in the management of the sails and the guidance of the helm. There are a thousand unavoidable accidents which circumscribe the command he possesses over his own fortune. With the greatest industry he may be suddenly plunged into poverty; amidst the strictest observance of temperance he may be afflicted with disease; and in the practice of every virtue that adorns human life he may be the victim of misfortune, from the ingratitude and baseness of his fellow-men, the untimely dissolution of cherished connections, or the wreck of schemes prudently formed, and of hopes wisely cherished.

Miseries and misfortunes like these, not depending on the conduct or character, it would be unreasonable to expect that conduct to be able to avert; but amidst them all he will not cease to feel, in various ways, the beneficial consequences and consolatory influence of his good actions. In the estimation of some people, a virtuous man ought never to be subject to accidental calamity; but it would probably be difficult to assign a reason why he should be more exempt than a man of contrary character, from the misery arising out of occurrences beyond human control. Why, it may be asked, should the vicious man suffer any thing but the consequences of his vices, includ-

ing of course the reproaches of his own conscience, and the actions as well as sentiments which his conduct occasions in others? These bad consequences, and the loss of that happiness which virtue would have brought in her train, constitute, it may be said, the proper difference between his fate and the fate of the virtuous man, and form a natural and sufficient reason, both to himself and others, for acting differently in future. Other evils which may happen to him can never operate to deter him from his guilty career, because he can see no connection that they have with it.

Whatever opinion we may entertain, however, as to the reasonableness of all men being on a level with regard to accidental and uncontrollable evils, the fact is certain, that in the actual condition of mankind we do not see the virtuous enjoying an exemption from any evils but such as are the peculiar consequences of those vices from which they refrain; nor, on the other hand, do we see the vicious deprived of any benefits but such as are to be attained exclusively by virtuous conduct. We should expect, therefore, from virtuous actions and qualities only their peculiar consequences; and in recommending them to others, we should be careful to do it on just and proper grounds. It is injurious to the cause of good morals to invest virtue with false powers, because every day's experience may detect the fallacy, and he who has proved the unsoundness of part of our recommendation, may reasonably grow suspicious of the whole. Many of our writers of fiction, with the best intentions, injure the cause which they support by rewarding virtuous conduct with accidental good fortune. After involving a good man, for example, in a combination of calamitous circumstances, in which he conducts himself with scrupulous honor and integrity, they extricate him from his difficulties, as a re-

ward for his virtue, by the unexpected discovery of a rich uncle, who was supposed to have died in poverty; or by a large legacy from a distant relation, who happened most opportunely to quit the world at the required crisis. All such representations, leading as they do to the expectation of fortuitous advantages in recompense of good actions, cannot be otherwise than pernicious. If writers wish to represent a good man contending with misfortune (by which they may certainly convey a most excellent lesson) their aim ought to be, to exhibit the sources of consolation which he finds, as well in his own consciousness, as in the impression which his conduct has made on those around him; in the esteem, gratitude, and affection of those amongst whom he has lived, and in the actions on their part to which these sentiments give birth.

The true moral of fictitious writings lies in the clear exhibition of the tendencies of actions; and if any thing is conceded to the production of effect, it ought to be, not a change in the character of these tendencies, but a more lucid development of them than life actually presents. Although the painter is allowed to unite beauties on his canvas which are rarely presented by nature in actual combination, and to sink all those attendant circumstances, which, however commonly occurring, would impair the effect to be produced, still he must faithfully adhere to the qualities of natural objects; and, in the same way, although the dramatist may give us a selection of actions and incidents disentangled from superfluous details and accompaniments, he must exhibit them according to their true tendencies and relations.

There is another consideration relative to the present subject which is deserving of notice. What appears the inevitable consequence of circumstances not in our power, is frequently the natural effect of some subordinate part

of our character. The industrious man, who appears at first sight to have been ruined by the misconduct of others, or by some unexpected revolution in the business of society, may in reality owe his ruin to a want of circumspection, prudence or foresight. The natural consequence of his industry was prosperity, but the natural consequence of his imprudence was loss and misfortune. We must not expect that the exercise of one virtue will be followed by the beneficial consequences of all, neither must we conclude that the indulgence of any vice will be pursued by unmixed evil, and destroy the good effects of better qualities. All the virtues and the vices have their respective good and evil consequences, which will be felt in proportion as each vice and virtue is exercised. Industry, economy, shrewdness, and caution, for instance, without any great admixture of moral worth, or even in conjunction with meanness and fraudulence, may often be successful in the attainment of wealth; while these qualities, so attended, can never yield the fruits of integrity, ease of conscience, elevation of character, and the esteem of the good.

From all that has been said it sufficiently appears, that although our fortune, our rank in life, our bodily organization, and many other circumstances of our condition, may not be materially subject to our control, yet that our health, our peace of mind, our estimation in the world, our place in the affections of our friends, and our happiness in general, will inevitably be more or less regulated by the part which we act and the properties of our character. It is a serious consideration, and one which ought to have more weight in the world than it appears to possess, that all our actions and all our qualities have some certain tendency, and may greatly affect our well-being; that in every thing we do, we may be possibly laying a

train of consequences, the operation of which may terminate only with our existence; and that a steady adherence to the rules of virtue and a conformity to the dictates of discretion, are the only securities we can provide for the happiness of our future destiny.

ESSAY VI.

ON SOME OF THE CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF INDIVIDUAL CHARACTER.

WHATEVER subsequent circumstances may effect, it can scarcely be questioned, that all human beings come into the world with the germs of peculiar mental as well as physical qualities. Attempts, indeed, have been made to resolve all mental varieties into the effects of dissimilar external circumstances, but with too little success to require any formal refutation. We are, then, naturally led to inquire, how are these original peculiarities occasioned? Whence arise those qualities of mind which constitute the individuality of men? There must be causes why the mind as well as the body of one man differs constitutionally from that of another; what are they? Perhaps all that can be said in reply to these inquiries is, that the mental, like the bodily constitution of every individual, depends, in some inexplicable way, on the conjoint qualities of his parents. It depends, evidently, not on the qualities of one of the parents only, but on those of both. A moment's reflection will teach us, that the individuality of any human being, that ever existed, was absolutely dependent on the union of one particular man with one particular woman. If either the husband or the wife had been different, a different being would have come into the

world. For the production of the individual called Shakspeare, it was necessary that his father should marry the identical woman whom he did marry. Had he selected any other wife, the world would have had no Shakspeare. He might have had a son, but that son would have been an essentially different individual; he would have been the same neither in mental nor physical qualities; he would have been placed in a different position amongst mankind, and subject to the operation of different circumstances. It seems highly probable also, that if a marriage had taken place between the same male and female either at an earlier or a later period of their lives, the age at which they came together would have affected the identity of the progeny. If they had been married, for instance, in the year 1810, their eldest son would not be the same being as if they had been married ten years sooner. It may be remarked, too, that not only the time at which persons are married, but their mode of living, and their habits generally, as they have the power to affect the physical constitution of their progeny, may also affect the constitution of their minds, and occasion beings to be brought into the world absolutely different from those who would have seen the light under other circumstances.

With regard to physical conformation, every one knows that the face and figure are frequently transmitted from parents to their offspring. Sometimes the father's form and lineaments seem to predominate, sometimes the mother's, and sometimes there is a variety produced, unlike either of the parents; but by what principles these proportions and modifications are regulated, it is impossible to ascertain. The transmission of mental qualities is not, perhaps, equally apparent, but it is equally capricious. In some cases we see the characteristics of the parents perpetuated in their offspring, and in other cases no re-

semblance is to be discovered. The passions and temper appear to be frequently inherited; and although the proneness of children to imitation may partly account for the appearance, it cannot be admitted as a complete explanation, since the same spirit will manifest itself where parents and children have never lived together. The resemblance between their intellectual properties is seldom equally striking. In these, though there is no reason to suppose that they are not equally transmissible, there is at least less room for imitation. It is a common remark, that the sons of eminent men are themselves rarely conspicuous for talents; and yet, on the other hand, intellectual characteristics are sometimes known to run through whole families.

We have already intimated, that both the mental and physical constitution seem to depend on the united qualities of both the parents; not solely, however, for we every day see phenomena both of mind and body, which we can refer only to inexplicable accidents. Such are idiotism and mal-organization. The instances which may be cited of dull children being the offspring of parents, both of whom have been remarkable for quickness of intellect, present no greater difficulty than analogous instances with regard to corporeal qualities. It is as easily conceivable that two peculiar constitutions, which separately occasioned or were attended by intellectual quickness, may produce the reverse in the offspring, as that a fair child may be born of parents both of whom have dark complexions.

These cursory observations naturally lead us to reflect on the long chain of consequences of which the marriage of two persons may be the first link; and what an important influence such an union may have on human affairs. If two men and two women founded a colony, by remov-

ing to some uninhabited district or island, where they were cut off from all intercourse with the rest of their species; the whole train of subsequent events in that colony to the end of time would depend on the manner in which they paired. If the older man married the older woman a different train of affairs, it is manifest, would ensue, from that which would take place if the older man married the younger woman. In the first case, the offspring of the marriage would be totally different individuals from those which would have been brought into the world in the second case. They would think, feel, and act, in a widely different manner, and not a single event depending on human action would be precisely the same as any event in the other case.

As a farther illustration, it may not be devoid of amusement to trace the consequences which would have ensued, or rather which would have been prevented, had the father of some eminent character formed a different matrimonial connection. Suppose the father of Bonaparte had married any other lady than the one who was actually destined to become his mother. Agreeably to the tenor of the preceding observations, it is obvious that Bonaparte himself would not have appeared in the world. The affairs of France would have fallen into different hands, and have been conducted in another manner. The measures of the British cabinet, the debates in Parliament, the subsidies to foreign powers, the battles by sea and land, the marches and countermarches, the wounds, deaths, and promotions, the fears, and hopes, and anxieties of a thousand individuals, would all have been different. The speculations of those writers and speakers who employed themselves in discussing these various subjects, and canvassing the conduct of this celebrated man, would not have been called forth. The train of ideas in every mind interested in

public affairs would not have been the same. Pitt would not have made the same speeches, nor Fox the same replies. Lord Byron's poetry would have wanted some splendid passages. The Duke of Wellington might have still been plain Arthur Wellesley. Mr. Warden would not have written his book, nor the Edinburgh critic his review of it; nor could the author of this essay have availed himself of his present illustration. The imagination of the reader will easily carry him through all the various consequences to soldiers and sailors, tradesmen and artisans, printers and booksellers, downward through every gradation of society. In a word, when we take into account these various consequences, and the thousand ways in which the mere intelligence of Bonaparte's proceedings, and of the measures pursued to counteract them, influenced the feelings, the speech, and the actions of mankind, it is scarcely too much to say, that the single circumstance of Bonaparte's father marrying as he did, has more or less affected almost every individual in Europe, as well as a numerous multitude in the other quarters of the globe.

We see, from the preceding glance, what an important share an individual may have in modifying the course of events, and how his influence may extend, in some way or other, through the minutest ramifications of society. Yet amidst all this influence, we may also perceive the operation of general causes; of those principles of the mind common to all individuals, and of the physical circumstances by which they are surrounded. The individual character itself, indeed, partly receives its tone and properties from general causes, and much of the reaction which it exerts may be, in an indirect sense, ascribed to them. Thus, although the marriage of Bonaparte's father and mother, the connection of those particular persons,

was the cause of his existence, and of many of the peculiarities by which he was distinguished, yet his character and conduct were in no small degree moulded by the spirit of the age. There are many general causes, it is obvious, which would have operated although any given person had never come into the world. There is a certain progress or course of affairs, that holds on, amidst all the various impressions, the checks, and the impulses, which it receives from individual character. If Bonaparte had never existed, the nations of the earth would, in all likelihood, have been in much the same relative situation as they are, and, at all events, they would have made similar advances in political knowledge. The violence of the French Revolution would probably have been directed by some other ambitious leader against the states of Europe; it might have lasted nearly the same time, and subsided in a similar way. But although the general result might have been in many respects similar, the train of political events would have been altogether different; there would have been quite a different mass of materials for the future historian.

The remark may be extended, with still more certainty, to almost all the arts and sciences. Composed as their history necessarily is of the achievements of individuals, their advancement is the result of general causes, and independent in a certain sense on individual character. The inventions of printing and gunpowder, the discovery of the virtues of the loadstone, and even the inductive logic of Bacon, were sure to mark the progress of human affairs, and were not owing to the mere personal qualities, nor necessarily bound to the destiny of those who promulgated them to the world. The discoveries of modern astronomy would doubtless have been ultimately attained, although such a person as Sir Isaac Newton had never seen the

light; but they would not have been attained in the same way, nor perhaps at the same period. The science, it is probable, would have been extremely dissimilar in the detail, in the rapidity of its progress, and the order of its discoveries, while there is every reason to think it would have been much the same in its final result.

ESSAY VII.

ON THE VICISSITUDES OF LIFE.

Although the events of our lives appear in the retrospect naturally enough connected with each other, yet if we compare two widely distant periods of the past, we shall often find them so discordant as to excite our surprise that the same being should have been placed in circumstances so essentially dissimilar. And if we could foresee some of the circumstances of our future lives, it would frequently appear quite out of the limits of possibility that we should be brought into them. Our present state would seem so full of insurmountable obstacles to such a change, that we could not form a conjecture by what instrumentality it was to be effected; we could not conceive how the current of our destiny was to be so strangely diverted from its original course, nor how the barriers, which circumscribe our condition, were to be so entirely overthrown. But time gradually elaborates apparent impossibilities into very natural and consistent events. A friend is lost by death; a rival is removed from the sphere of competition; a superior falls and leaves a vacancy in society to be filled up; a series of events renders a measure advisable, of which a few years before we never dreamed; new circumstances bring around us new persons; novel connections open fresh prospects; objects

before unknown excite passions before dormant, and rouse talents of which we were scarcely conscious; and our whole ideas and feelings varying and keeping pace with these revolutions, we are at length brought quite naturally into the very condition, which a few years ago seemed utterly irreconcilable with our position in the world and our relations to society. Many circumstances of our lives would appear like dreams, if we were abruptly thrown into them, without perceiving the succession of events by which we came there. We should feel like the poor man in the Arabian Tales, who, while under the influence of a sleeping draught, was divested of his clothes, and attired like a prince, and on awaking was strangely perplexed to find himself surrounded by all the outward appendages of royalty, and by a crowd of attendants who treated him as their monarch. It is the gradual development of events, their connection and dependence on each other, and the corresponding changes in our views, which give the character of reality to actual life, as they confer it on the fictions of imagination. A succession of trivial changes carries the mind without abruptness to a wide distance from its former station, as a staircase conducts us to a lofty eminence by a series of minute elevations. Hence it is that men seldom suffer those extreme sensations from a change of circumstances which we are sometimes led to expect. Persons in low life are apt to think that the splendor, to which a man of their own class has raised himself by industry and talents, must teem with uninterrupted enjoyment; that the contrast of his former lowliness with his present elevation must be a perennial spring of pleasurable emotion. It may indeed occasionally yield him gratifying reflections, but it is seldom in his power to feel the full force of the difference. It is not in nature that at one and the same time he should feel ardent

admiration of splendor and familiarity with it; the panting desire for an object and the satisfied sense of enjoyment. He cannot combine at the same moment the possession of the feelings of two remote periods of his life, so as alternately to pass from one to the other, and revel in the full rapture of the contrast. No power of imagination can present him at once with two vivid landscapes of his mental condition at two different junctures, so as to enable him to bring into distinct comparison all their lights, and shades, and colors. The hand of time has been constantly at work to wear out the impressions of his past existence. While he has been led from one vicissitude to another, from one state of mind to a different state, almost all the peculiarities of his original views and feelings have been successively dropped in his progress, till it has become an effort, if not an impossibility, to recollect them with any sort of clearness and precision.

The same revolution of feeling takes place when a man sinks into adversity, although memory perhaps is then more active and tenacious. A wonder is sometimes expressed, that one who has been unfortunate in the world should be able to retain so much cheerfulness amidst the recollection of former times, which must press on his mind; times when friends thronged around him, when every eye seemed to greet him with pleasure, and every object to share his satisfaction. Now destitute, forsaken, obscure, how is it that he is not overpowered by the contrast? There are moments, it cannot be doubted, when he acutely feels the transition, but this cannot be the ordinary state of his mind. Many of his views having been displaced by others, his feelings having gradually conformed to his circumstances, and his attention being occupied with present objects, he has not that oppressive, habitual sense of the change, which a mere looker-on is

apt to suppose. An indifferent observer, indeed, is often more powerfully struck with the contrast than the subject of it, not having to look at the former state through all the intermediate ideas and emotions, and being occupied only with the difference in external appearances. He contrasts (if we may have recourse to our former figure) only the base and the summit of the tower, while the staircase which connects them is concealed from his view.

It is certain that men frequently bear calamities much better than they themselves would have previously expected. In misfortunes which are of gradual growth, every change contracts and reduces their views, and prepares them for another; and they at length find themselves involved in the gloom of adversity without any violent transition. How many have there been, who, while basking in the smiles of fortune, and revelling in the luxuries of opulence, would have been completely overpowered by a revelation of their future doom; yet when the vicissitudes of life have brought them into those circumstances, they have met their misfortunes with calmness and resignation. The records of the French Revolution abound with instances of extraordinary fortitude in those from whom it could have been least expected, and who, a few years before, would probably have shrunk with horror from the bare imagination of their own fate. Women, as well as men, were seen to perish on the scaffold without betraying the least symptom of fear.

Even when calamity suddenly assails us, it is remarkable how soon we become familiarized with our novel situation. After the agony of the first shock has subsided, the mind seems to relinquish its hold on its former pleasures, to call in its affections from the various objects on which they had fixed themselves, and to endeavor to concentrate them on the few solaces remaining. By the

force of perpetual and intense rumination, the rugged and broken path, by which the imagination passes from its present to its former state, is worn smooth and rendered continuous: and the aspect of surrounding objects becoming familiar, loses half the horror lent to it by the first agitated survey.

If it be thus true, that men in general bear calamities much better than they themselves would have expected, and that affliction brings along with it a portion of its own antidote, it is a fact which may serve to cheer us in the hour of gloomy anticipation. To reflect that what would be agony to us in our present state of mind, with our present views, feelings, and associations, may at a future time prove a very tolerable evil, because the state of our mind will be different; that in the greatest misfortunes which may befall us, we shall probably possess sufficient strength and equanimity to bear the burden of our calamity, may be of some use in dispelling those melancholy forebodings which are too apt to disturb the short period of life. It may lead us to more cheerful views of human existence.

There are few men of reflection to whose minds the fragility of human happiness has not been forcibly suggested by the very instances in which that happiness appears in its brightest colors. They have hung over it as over the early flowret of spring, which the next blast may destroy. As the lovely bride, blooming with health and animated with love and hope, has passed by in the day of her triumph, they have contrasted the transitory happiness of the hour with the long train of disappointments and calamities, diseases and deaths, with which the most fortunate life is familiar, and many of which inevitably spring from the event which the beautiful creature before them, unconscious of all but the immediate pros-

pect, is welcoming with a heart full of happiness and a countenance radiant with smiles. She seems a victim, on whom a momentary illumination has fallen only to be followed by deeper gloom. 'Ah!' said a poor emaciated but still youthful woman, as she was standing at the door of her cottage while a gay bridal party were returning from church, 'they little think what they are about. I was left a widow with two children at the age of twenty-one.'

It was in the same spirit that Gray wrote his Ode on the Prospect of Eton College. After describing the sports of the schoolboys in strains familiar to every reader, he makes a natural and beautiful transition to their future destiny.

'Alas! regardless of their doom,
The little victims play!
No sense have they of ills to come,
No care beyond to-day;
Yet see how all around them wait
The ministers of human fate,
And black misfortune's baleful train!
Ah! show them where in ambush stand,
To seize their prey, the murd'rous band!
Ah! tell them they are men.'

In the indulgence of such reflections, however, it is to be remembered that we are contrasting distant events of life, bringing together extreme situations, of which to pass suddenly from one to the other might be intolerable anguish, and that we are suppressing all the circumstances which lie between, and prepare a comparatively easy and gradual transition.

It is evident from the tenor of the preceding observations, that most of the intense pleasures and poignant sorrows of mankind must be experienced in passing from

one condition to another, not in any permanent state; and that the intensity of the feeling will materially depend on the suddenness of the change.

On comparing the condition of a peasant and a peer, we cannot perhaps perceive much superiority of happiness in either. The ideas and feelings of the peasant are adjusted to the circumstances by which he is surrounded, and the coarseness of his fare and the homeliness of his dwelling excite no emotions of uneasiness. The notions of the peer are equally well adjusted to the pomp and refinements of rank and affluence. Luxurious dainties and splendid decorations, courteous deference and vulgar homage, are too familiar to raise any peculiar emotions of pleasure. But if a poor man rises to affluence, or a rich man sinks into poverty, such circumstances are no longer neutral. The former feels delight in his new acquisitions, and the latter is pained by the want of his habitual luxuries and accustomed splendor. In the same manner that a substance may feel cold to one hand and warm to another, according to the different temperatures to which they have been antecedently exposed, so any rank or situation in life may yield pleasure or pain according to the previous condition of the person who is placed in it.

Hence we may perceive the error of such moralists as contend, that fame, wealth, power, or any other acquisition, is not worth pursuit, because those who are in possession of it are not happier than their fellow-creatures. They may not indeed be happier, but this by no means proves, that the object is not worth pursuing, since there may be much pleasure, not only in the chase, but in the novelty of the acquisition. The fortune which a man acquires by some successful effort, may not after a while afford him more gratification than his former moderate competence; but in order to estimate its value, we must

take into account all the pleasurable emotions which would flow in upon him until a perfect familiarity with his new circumstances had established itself in his mind.

Such moralists seem to forget, that man, by the necessity of his nature, must have some end, which he can pursue with ardor; that to be without aim and object is to be miserable; that the necessary business of life requires, on the part of many, an ardent aspiration after wealth, power, and reputation; and that it is not the pursuits themselves, but the vices with which they may be connected, that are proper objects of reprobation. It is, in fact, by yielding to the passions and principles of his constitution, within proper limits, and under proper restrictions, not by the vain attempt to suppress them, that man promotes the happiness of himself and society.

ESSAY VIII.

ON THE VARIETY OF INTELLECTUAL PURSUITS.

The various arts and sciences may be compared to the pictures in a large gallery. Every one who has passed through one of these magnificent repositories, knows how vain is the attempt to understand the subject, and estimate the merits, of all the specimens of art exposed to his view, in the short space of time usually allotted to the survey. As he throws his glances around, his eye is dazzled and his mind confused by the diversity of representations, and he at length finds it expedient to limit his attention to a few, which may have been pointed out by particular circumstances or general celebrity. In the same manner, the subjects of knowledge are too numerous and complicated, and human life far too short, to allow even the highest intellect to embrace the whole. As we look through the vast accumulation of science, our minds would be oppressed by the various objects which present themselves, did we not take them in detail, and concentrate our observation on a part. Those, therefore, who wish to excel in intellectual pursuits, find it necessary to direct their principal efforts to some particular science or branch of literature. They thus escape the perplexity and superficialness of such as dissipate their attention on a multitude of subjects, and are far more likely to enlarge

the boundaries of knowledge than by a more indiscriminate application. This division of labor in the intellectual world, however, is not without its disadvantages. As the artisan, who is chained down to the drudgery of one mechanical operation, is a much inferior being to the savage, who is continually thrown upon the resources of his own mind in novel circumstances; who has to devise and execute plans of aggression and defence, to extricate himself from difficulties and encounter dangers, and who thus acquires a wonderful versatility of talent; so the man, who has devoted himself to one science, often loses by a comparison with him who has suffered his mind to wander over all the various and beautiful regions of knowledge. What the former gains in accuracy and nicety of tact, he loses in copiousness of ideas and comprehensiveness of views; and thus it sometimes appears in the intellectual as well as in the civil world, as if the perfection of individual character must be sacrificed to the general progress of society. Although there is this tendency in the rapid advance of knowledge, and although a concentrated attention is requisite to success, yet it is by no means necessary that men should devote themselves exclusively to their favorite subjects. The sciences are so connected, if by nothing else, at least by the general logical principles pervading the whole, that they throw light on each other; and he has the fairest chance of success in any one career, who starts well furnished with general information, while he possesses the only means of saving himself from becoming an intellectual artisan.

Another disadvantage attending the multiplicity of knowledge, and the consequent division of intellectual labor, lies in forming classes of men having little fellow-feeling, inasmuch as they cannot readily enter with interest into each other's darling pursuits. The mathematician hears of

a new species of plants with all possible apathy, and the antiquarian scarcely gives himself the trouble of inquiring after the most brilliant discoveries of the chemist. In proportion, too, as a science becomes complex and extensive, requiring minute application, it is removed from general participation and sympathy. It cannot be expected that the various acquirements of scientific men should be duly estimated and relished by that numerous body of people not destitute of mental culture, who come under the denomination of general readers. Almost all the sciences are defended by a host of peculiar ideas and technicalities in language, which effectually bar the approach of such as have not gone through a regular process of initiation. The acutest mind might expend its efforts in vain on subjects of which it did not comprehend the terms. Pope has well described the effect which would ensue from a sudden plunge into mathematical science.

> 'Full in the midst of Euclid dip at once,
> And petrify a genius to a dunce.'

There is, however, a large class of subjects, in which almost all men of cultivated minds can take an equal interest; subjects which relate to man himself, and chiefly to those phenomena of his nature which lie exposed to common observation. The elementary knowledge required in topics relating to morals, manners, and taste, is possessed by all, the terms in which they are treated of form the common language of daily intercourse, and every mind feels itself confident to pronounce on the positions in the expression of which they are employed. That the sum of the squares of the two sides of a right-angled triangle is equal to the square of the hypothenuse, can be fully comprehended by such only as have gone through a previous course of instruction; but every one can understand

on the first enunciation, that it is ridiculous in a country girl to affect the fine lady, and base in a man to fawn on the minions of power. There are also other and stronger reasons why, while the subjects alluded to attract so much, many of the sciences attract so small a portion of general interest. The latter address themselves to the intellect alone. They are fraught with none of those interesting associations of hope, and joy, and sympathy, which cling to the productions of the poet, the moralist, and the historian. They teem not with passion and feeling ; they call not into play the sensibilities of our nature ; they make no appeal to the experience of our hearts. They cannot therefore appear otherwise than dry and devoid of attraction to those whose views are circumscribed by the ordinary affairs of life, who have never leapt the boundaries which encircle the regions of abstract truth and recondite knowledge, nor learned to invest them with those pleasurable associations, which a vigorous effort to master their difficulties has created in others.

It may be remarked, however, that this want of the power of awakening the feelings, this defect of vital warmth in the abstruser sciences, is not without its advantages. Some of the finest pleasures of our nature are those of pure intellect, without any mixture of human passion. When the mind has been agitated by the cares of the world, irritated by folly or disgusted by vice, it is an attainment of no despicable importance to be able, for a while, to divest itself of its connection with mankind, by taking refuge in the abstractions of science, where there is no object to drag it back to the events of the past, or revive the fever of its sensibility. It is such a welcome transition as we experience in passing from the burning rays of a vertical sun to the delicious coolness of a grotto.

We may gather from the preceding observations, that in works of polite literature, more especially works of imagination, too much care cannot be employed in avoiding the peculiar characteristics of science. To be generally interesting, their subjects and phraseology should carry along with them their own light; and their success will also greatly depend on the frequency and effect with which they appeal to the feelings possessed in common by all well-informed readers. One of the most noted instances of the neglect of both these points is Dr. Darwin's poem of the Botanic Garden, which, though it contains passages of dazzling splendor, fails to interest, because it is loaded with the obscurities of scientific nomenclature and allusion; and full of topics, vast and magnificent, but not within the range of ordinary feeling; bright and imposing, but without warmth and vitality.

The same principles will also serve to explain why poems, founded on the superstitions and manners of other nations, excite a comparatively weak and transient interest. In the first place, a poem of this class must necessarily be a learned poem, and it requires an effort on the part of the reader to enter into its allusions, and comprehend the learning which it exhibits; secondly, the associations and feelings ascribed to the characters can never lay hold of his mind with the same power as those which spring from indigenous customs and superstitions. No part of the mythology of the Curse of Kehama could ever excite, in the soul of an Englishman, so profound an interest as the appearance of Banquo's ghost, in the tragedy of Macbeth. In the one case we may admire the skill of the poet, and even imagine the emotions of his characters; in the other, the emotions are our own. The Lalla Rookh of Moore is another example in point. The poet has skilfully availed himself of a variety of oriental illustrations,

calculated to delight the fancy, but they do not fasten on the mind like allusions to familiar objects; and it may be questioned whether his pretty eastern princesses, surrounded with a profusion of birds, and butterflies, and flowers, have enabled him to charm his readers as he would have done by the description of a lovely Englishwoman, with English manners, and amidst English scenery. The passions of human nature are no doubt much the same all over the world, and a vivid representation of them will be attractive under all the modifications of different habits and manners; but it will be more vivid and more attractive when it appeals to our sympathy through the medium of our usual associations.

The differences already pointed out between works of science and those of morality and imagination, necessarily give rise to different kinds of reputation. The fame of a scientific author is in some measure confined to the circle of those who understand the subject; or, if it overstep this limit, it becomes known only as a bare fact on the testimony of others. The fame of a poet, or a moralist, on the contrary, pervades all society, not as a matter of fact, but a matter of feeling. It is not merely the echo of his merits that reaches us, but it is his own voice to which we listen. His noble sentiments, his beautiful images, his brilliant wit, his felicitous expressions, mingle themselves with our intellectual being, and constitute a part of the public mind.

Newton and Shakspeare are perhaps equally illustrious, but certainly possess different kinds of reputation. Newton can be deservedly appreciated only by those few, who can track his gigantic advances in science; to the world at large he is a man who has made discoveries, wonderful enough, but of which they can form no adequate conception. Shakspeare, on the other hand, is read and admired

by all; they speak in his words, and think in his thoughts. Not only the fame, but the manifestations of his genius live in their recollection, and his sentiments and expressions rise spontaneously as their own. Newton shines to the world like a remote though brilliant star. Shakspeare like the sun, which warms mankind as well as enlightens them.

ESSAY IX.

ON PRACTICAL AND SPECULATIVE ABILITY.

In the intercourse of the world, every one must have observed two kinds of talent, so distinct from each other as to admit of different appellations, although frequently united in the same person. One has reference exclusively to the operations of the mind, and may be called speculative ability; the other has reference to the application of knowledge, or to action, and may be called practical ability. Speculative ability may be seen in the composition of a poem, the solution of a problem, the formation of a chain of reasoning, or the invention of a story. In these performances nothing is required but an exertion of the mental powers: they are purely internal operations, and although they may be assisted by the employment of external means, it would be possible to carry them on without it.

Practical ability may be seen in every department of active life. It consists in the dexterous application of means for the attainment of ends. The term may be extended to every sort of skill, whether exerted in important or trivial matters; but it is here meant to designate, not so much any technical dexterity, or that which a man evinces in the employment of his physical powers on inanimate objects, as that higher skill by which he directs the

talents and passions of his fellow-creatures to the accomplishment of his purposes, and seizes the opportunities of action presented by successive events; and which enables him to conduct himself with propriety and success, in any circumstances into which he may be thrown.

The two kinds of ability here pointed out must exist more or less in every individual. But they are often combined in very unequal proportions. A high degree of speculative is frequently found in conjunction with a low degree of practical ability, and conversely, the practical talents are sometimes superior to the speculative. Men, who have exhibited the greatest powers of mind in their writings, have been found altogether inefficient in active life, and incapable of availing themselves of their own wisdom. With comprehensive views and a capacity for profound reasoning on human affairs, they have felt bewildered in actual emergencies: keen and close observers of the characters, the failings, and the accomplishments of others, they have not had the power of conforming their own conduct to their theoretical standard of excellence. Giants in the closet, they have proved but children in the world. This destitution of practical talent in men of fine intellect often excites the wonder of the crowd. They seem to expect that he, who has shown powers of mind bespeaking an almost all-comprehensive intelligence, and who has perhaps poured a flood of light on the path of action to be pursued by others, should, as a matter of course, be able to achieve any enterprise and master any difficulties himself. Such expectations, however, are unreasonable and ill-founded. Excellence in one thing does not necessarily confer excellence in all, or even in things requiring the exercise of the same faculties. Both practical and speculative ability are no doubt modifications of mental power: but one, on that account, by no means

implies the other, any more than dexterity in reefing a sail involves the art of leaping a five-barred gate, though they are both instances of physical skill.

It would be just as reasonable, indeed, to expect that a good sailor should be necessarily a clever horseman, as that a man of fine speculative powers should in consequence be also a man of practical talent. The want of practical ability then, in such a man, may arise simply from an exclusive attention to processes purely mental. Where the mind is entirely absorbed by the relations of science, or where its powers are habitually concentrated on its own creations, it is perfectly natural that the arts of active life should not be acquired. To a man so occupied common objects and occurrences have little interest, and it is with effort that he commands his attention sufficiently to avoid egregious mistakes, and to gain a passable dexterity in things which all the world are expected to know and to perform. The understanding, moreover, that is accustomed to pursue a regular and connected train of ideas, becomes in some measure incapacitated for those quick and versatile movements which are learned in the commerce of the world, and are indispensable to those who act a part in it. Deep thinking and practical talents require indeed habits of mind so essentially dissimilar, that while a man is striving after the one he will be unavoidably in danger of losing the other. The justness of these observations might be supported, if necessary, by a reference to the characters of a number of men distinguished by their literary and scientific accomplishments. It will be sufficient to adduce the instance of the celebrated author of the Wealth of Nations. Few writers have carried profound and systematic thinking farther, or attained more comprehensive views of human policy ; and the effects on his character, as might have been anticipated, were seen

in a want of the proper qualifications for bustle and business. 'He was certainly,' says his biographer, 'not fitted for the general commerce of the world, or for the business of active life. The comprehensive speculations with which he had been occupied from his youth, and the variety of materials which his own invention continually supplied to his thoughts, rendered him habitually inattentive to familiar objects, and to common occurrences; and he frequently exhibited instances of absence, which have scarcely been surpassed by the fancy of La Bruyere. Even in company he was apt to be engrossed with his studies; and appeared, at times, by the motion of his lips, as well as by his looks and gestures, to be in the fervor of composition.' *

The want of practical talent, in other cases, may be accounted for by a certain gentleness, reservedness, or timidity of disposition, which causes its possessor to shrink from the encounter of his fellow-creatures. Whatever it proceeds from, whether it is the effect of natural constitution, weakness of nerves, delicacy of organization, or the faulty associations of early life, it is certain that this disposition is frequently the accompaniment of superior genius. We are told that Virgil possessed it in a remarkable degree; Addison seems to have had a similar temperament; and it was the prominent weakness of Cowper. In the latter indeed it assumed a decidedly morbid character, and appears to have been either the cause of his insanity or a strong symptom of its approach. To such an extreme did it oppress him, that, according to his own declaration, a public exhibition of himself was mortal poison to his feelings.

* An Account of the Life and Writings of Dr. Adam Smith, by Dugald Stewart.

Where this imperfection of character exists, it must be an insuperable obstacle to success in active life. That power of intellect, nevertheless, which is thus circumscribed, is not destroyed. Power, whether of body or mind, has always an unconquerable tendency to exert itself; and he, who is not endowed with the energy of temperament necessary to bring his intellect into play amidst the conflict of worldly interests, will turn its whole force to those pursuits in which his timidity will be no incumbrance. Thus both Addison and Cowper, although they were ill calculated to make a figure when the manifestation of their talents depended on personal action, could accomplish more than most of their species, when they entered the free field of composition, unimpeded by the restraints of external circumstances. The character of Addison, indeed, may be selected as a striking instance of admirable speculative powers, combined with a deficiency of practical talent, in circumstances favorable to its cultivation. By the force of his genius, without the aid of hereditary fortune or family connections, he rose to an important office in the state, and had every opportunity of qualifying himself to discharge its duties with credit and effect. The course of his education, and the career through which he subsequently passed, seemed to combine whatever was necessary to form and direct the powers of a practical statesman: yet, notwithstanding all his advantages, and all his accomplishments, he was found incompetent to fill the situation to which his general abilities, rather than any obvious fitness in the eyes of others, may be presumed to have raised him. 'In the year 1717 he rose,' says Dr. Johnson, 'to his highest elevation, being made secretary of state. For this employment he might be justly supposed qualified by long practice of business, and by his regular ascent through

other offices; but expectation is often disappointed; it is universally confessed that he was unequal to the duties of his place. In the House of Commons he could not speak, and therefore was useless to the defence of the government. In the office, says Pope, he could not issue an order without losing his time in quest of fine expressions. What he gained in rank, he lost in credit; and finding by experience his own inability, was forced to solicit his dismission with a pension of fifteen hundred pounds a year.' *

It is perhaps quite as common to meet with the reverse of the phenomenon which we have been considering; to find considerable practical talents combined with comparatively feeble powers of speculation. The language and conduct of men of business, both in private life and in the administration of public affairs, frequently involve principles decidedly erroneous, and when brought to the test of scientific investigation, even palpably absurd; and yet it is almost as difficult to convince them of their error, and to place their minds in a position for viewing the subject aright, as to give an idea of colors to the blind. Hence it is years, and almost ages, before the discoveries of science and philosophy are adopted in practice. The habit of looking at present expedients, and forming hasty conclusions from superficial appearances, seems to incapacitate such men for raising their views to remote consequences, and tracing the operation of general principles. Their incapacity for mere intellectual processes, except of the simplest sort, is in truth as remarkable as the awkwardness of the philosopher in the active pursuits of life.

This superiority of their practical talents to their speculative powers may be explained on much the same grounds

* Lives of the Poets.

as the contrary case: it is occasioned by the exclusive application of their talents to business, and the intellectual habits thus created. We see in it another exemplification of the general principle, that a man will excel in that to which he lends the greatest attention. But there are some dispositions more qualified by nature for the business of the world than others. It has been already remarked, that the mind is frequently turned to speculative pursuits by constitutional timidity; and it is frequently determined to active pursuits by energy of temperament. Energy itself, without superiority of intellect, suffices to make a man of practical talent. It puts all his faculties to their utmost stretch, and gives him a decided control over all who are less bold and resolute than himself. Intellectual ability is, in fact, only an inert instrument: it is passion which is the moving power, and which brings it into operation; and a small measure of understanding may often do more when urged on by strong passion, or a determined will, than an infinitely larger portion with no vigor to set it in motion.

There is another quality of mind, not exactly the same as energy but often combined with it, which has usually a large share in the composition of practical talent, and that is, the presence of mind, or self-possession, which enables a man at all times to employ his powers to advantage. Madame de Stael, in her delineation of Bonaparte, remarks with her usual sagacity, that it was rather because other men did not act upon him than because he acted upon them, that he became their master. This power of not being acted upon by others gives a man a wonderful command over such as have less coolness than himself; and the susceptibility of being acted upon unfits him who is extremely subject to it for success in active life.

To the qualities already mentioned, as entering into

the composition of practical ability, we may add what is perhaps rather a habit than a natural property; a certain versatility of feeling as well as of intellect. A man of business, accustomed to pass rapidly from one thing to another, can enter with a proper degree of interest into any affair in which he finds himself engaged. He possesses a facility of transferring his attention and the exercise of his powers to successive objects, not only wthout distraction, but with proper confidence in himself; and from this property of his mind, together with the others already enumerated, he derives such a perfect command over his faculties as to bring them to bear with effect on every occasion.

Some of the highest functions which a man can be called to discharge, obviously require a considerable degree of both practical and speculative ability. This remark applies to the art of public speaking, which is materially indebted in its greatest excellence to grace of action, agreeable enunciation, skilful pliancy of tone, readiness of mind, acuteness and nicety of tact, boldness and self-possession; while all the beauty and logical force of an oration are the result of speculative power. But a man of only moderate speculative talents will often make a popular orator by an imposing manner, a perfect command over his ideas and feelings, and a graceful use of his personal advantages; and on the other hand, a man devoid of all these, a man of no practical ability, without making his way through our senses by the charms of voice or gesture, and even without the aid of perfect expression, will astonish and delight us by the mere potency of his thoughts. It is the soul of the speaker that seizes upon his auditors without the intervention of external artifice.

There is a subordinate kind of practical ability, which

consists in the easy and perfect management of ourselves in social intercourse. It may be termed ability of manner, and seems to depend in a great measure on the same qualities as other kinds of practical ability. It is occasionally found in a very high degree without much power of understanding. The man who has attained it, can conduct himself with propriety, and without embarrassment, in any company into which he happens to be thrown, and go through all the ceremonies of life with facility and grace. He has not only an instantaneous perception of what is proper to be said and done, on every occasion, but he has at command his language, his gestures, and even the expression of his countenance; so that he can always act up to his own sense of propriety, and exhibit to advantage whatever share he possesses of intellect and acquirements.

As one ingredient or accompaniment, or embellishment of ability of manner, we may mention that ready talent for conversation with which some are endowed, either by nature or education. Their ideas flow without effort, and clothe themselves in easy and appropriate language. Every thing around them, all that they see and hear, seems to awaken their memory or imagination. They are always fertile in topics, and expression never deserts them.

It is not uncommon for men of eminent talents to want this ability of manner, and to evince a considerable degree of awkwardness and embarrassment in the interchange of civilities. Though they may have a delicate perception of what is proper, yet having neither the facility, which is acquired by practice, nor the self-possession of less susceptible minds, they fail to exemplify their own ideas of propriety. The presence of a number of their fellow-creatures appears to oppress them with a

constraint, which fetters all their powers, particularly their powers of conversation. In vain do they task their minds for suitable topics of discourse. Their ideas seem to have vanished from their recollection, and their language is marked by hesitation and infelicity.

The character of Addison furnishes an illustration also of this part of our subject. It appears that all his commerce with society, and his intercourse with high life, had failed to give him the easy and unembarrassed carriage of a man of the world. According to Lord Chesterfield, he was the most timorous and awkward man that he ever saw. Dr. Johnson, who thinks this representation hyperbolical, nevertheless admits that he was deficient in readiness of conversation, and that every testimony concurs to prove his having been oppressed by an improper and ungraceful timidity. That his taciturnity arose from constraint, and not from want of power, is decided by the testimony of those who best knew him, to the attractive qualities of his conversation, when amongst his intimate friends. 'Addison's conversation,' says Pope, 'had something in it more charming than I have found in any other man. But this was only when familiar; before strangers, or perhaps a single stranger, he preserved his dignity by a stiff silence.'

Gray may be cited as another instance of the want of ability of manner, if reliance is to be placed on the representation of Horace Walpole, who thus speaks of him in one of his letters: 'I agree with you most absolutely in your opinion about Gray; he is the worst company in the world. From a melancholy turn, from living reclusely, and from a little too much dignity, he never converses easily. All his words are measured and chosen. His writings are admirable. He himself is not agreeable.' In this representation, some ill-nature and

exaggeration may be reasonably suspected, but the writer would scarcely have hazarded a portrait devoid of all resemblance to the original.

To these instances we may add the account given us of the manners of Adam Smith, by his biographer, Mr. Stewart: 'In the company of strangers, his tendency to absence, and perhaps still more his consciousness of that tendency, rendered his manner somewhat embarrassed; an effect which was probably not a little heightened by those speculative ideas of propriety, which his recluse habits tended at once to perfect in his conception, and to diminish his power of realizing.'

Although constraint or embarrassment, in the presence of others, must of itself impair a man's powers of conversation, other causes conspire to produce a deficiency of conversational talent in men of profound genius. It seems partly to arise from a want of versatility of mind, and from the nature of those relations by which their ideas are connected. Men of profundity are not versatile, because, from pursuing logical deductions and regular inventions, they grow accustomed to proceed with order and method. Their associations are of too strict a character to admit of rapid transitions from one subject to another; whereas the ideas of a man of the world, being connected by a thousand accidental ties, and superficial relations, are liable to be roused by any object or event which may present itself. What knowledge he possesses he has always at command; it may be of small amount, but his promptness at producing it frequently enables him to triumph over the philosopher, whose slow habits and abstract associations form a sort of ponderous machinery, requiring to be methodically worked to raise his ideas from the depths of his mind. But on this particular subject it would be idle to expatiate, since the world is already in

possession of the eloquent and philosophical explanation of Stewart. After illustrating 'the advantages which the philosopher derives, in the pursuit of science, from that sort of systematic memory, which his habits of arrangement give him,' he proceeds as follows:

'It may however be doubted, whether such habits be equally favorable to a talent for agreeable conversation; at least for that lively, varied, and unstudied conversation, which forms the principal charm of a promiscuous society. The conversation which pleases generally, must unite the recommendations of quickness, of ease, and of variety: and in all these three respects, that of the philosopher is apt to be deficient. It is deficient in quickness, because his ideas are connected by relations which occur only to an attentive and collected mind. It is deficient in ease, because these relations are not the casual and obvious ones by which ideas are associated in ordinary memories; but the slow discoveries of patient and often painful exertion. As the ideas, too, which he associates together, are commonly of the same class, or at least are referred to the same general principles, he is in danger of becoming tedious by indulging himself in long and systematical discourses; while another, possessed of the most inferior accomplishments, by laying his mind completely open to impressions from without, and by accommodating continually the course of his own ideas, not only to the ideas which are started by his companions, but to every trifling and unexpected accident that may occur to give them a new direction, is the life and soul of every society into which he enters.*

To this may be added, that the philosopher can feel

* Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind, vol. i., p. 422, &c.

little interest in many of those events which occasion fervent emotion in the minds of ordinary people; and since to feel an interest in any thing is to have the ideas excited, and the imagination awakened, his conversation will frequently fail in vivacity, because his feelings are not roused by a number of inconsiderable circumstances, about which others are vividly affected.

ESSAY X.

ON THE MUTABILITY OF HUMAN FEELINGS.

MAN is a mutable being. Objects are in continual fluctuation around him, and his views, feelings, and faculties are subject to the same law. Let any one compare the state of his mind at two distant periods of his life, and he will perceive a revolution, not only in his external relations, but in his moral and mental being: he is no longer the same man; his purposes, motives, affections, and views of life have been the subjects of a change, gradual perhaps in its progress, but great in its consummation. The object which he once regarded with all the enthusiasm of feeling, which seemed to be the very sun of his existence, and the bare mention of which thrilled through his heart, has totally vanished from his thoughts. The prospect which formerly looked so enchanting, is now cold and cheerless to his eye. He looks back, and cannot refrain from wondering, that, on circumstances of so trifling a nature his heart should have wasted such excess of passion. As a plain mansion meets his mature eye in the building, which to his infant gaze wore the appearance of a stately palace, so he discerns nothing but insignificance in those pursuits, which once filled and inflamed his imagination with their importance. A livelier description of such a change of feeling cannot perhaps be found,

than that which Lord Chesterfield has left us in a letter written a short time before his death: 'I have run,' says his Lordship, 'the silly round of business and pleasure and have done with them all. I have enjoyed all pleasures of the world, and consequently know their futility, and do not regret their loss. I appraise them at their real value, which is, in truth, very low: whereas those, that have not experienced, always overrate them. They only see their gay outside, and are dazzled with the glare; but I have seen behind the scenes: I have seen all the coarse pulleys and dirty ropes, which exhibit and move the gaudy machine; I have seen and smelt the tallow candles, which illuminate the whole decoration, to the astonishment and admiration of an ignorant audience. When I reflect back upon what I have seen, what I have heard, and what I have done, I can hardly persuade myself that all that frivolous hurry, and bustle, and pleasure of this world, had any reality; but I look upon all that has passed as one of the romantic dreams, which opium commonly occasions, and I do by no means desire to repeat the nauseous dose, for the sake of the fugitive dream.'

But besides these more important mental revolutions, there are others of a subordinate character, less remarked and less remembered. What a variety of desires, and passions, and tones of feeling, the same individual passes through in the course of a week! What alternations of hope and fear, humility and exultation, gladness and melancholy! What a change in our views of life, as we look upon it through the transient *media*, which successive passions rapidly interpose between the mind and its objects! Even the most uniform state is diversified by a train of little passions and desires, followed by disappointment or gratification; and, with many, the very days of the week and hours of the day have each their different sets of feelings and associations.

No stage or condition of life is free from that copious source of mental changes, the attainment of our desires. This principle of mutation runs through life, through every hour and every day, although it may attract our notice only on important occasions. The revolution of feeling will of course be proportioned to the intensity of desire with which we have pursued our object; and youth, as it is more liable to be inflamed and deluded by hope, will be peculiarly the season of such vicissitudes. In regard to almost every object of pursuit, we may say what the poet says of woman,

> 'The lovely toy so fiercely sought
> Hath lost its charm by being caught.' *

Many of the changes of feeling already noticed are manifestly experienced without appearing in our actions: they are bubbles on the stream, which rise and disappear without any kind of consequences. Others prompt our actions without making any permanent difference in our habitual conduct. It is indeed astonishing what a number of various emotions may pass through a man's mind and sway his actions without affecting the permanent tone of his character, on which they seem to leave as little trace behind them as an arrow of its flight through the air. There are others of a third class, however, which produce a considerable effect on the tenor of his character and conduct. Perhaps the principal of these are the revolutions of mind in which its affections are transferred from one set of objects, or one pursuit, to another. In the lapse of time they must occur to every one; but although all are subject to them, it is by no means in an equal degree. While some preserve a steadiness of taste and purpose, not to be suddenly altered by any of the vicissi-

* Lord Byron's Giaour.

tudes of life, others bend to every impulse, and fluctuate with every variation; a mutability which, if not under the control of strong sense, will inevitably lead to inconsistency of character. Such men seem to possess a constant susceptibility of being inflamed with ardor towards any object which happens to strike the imagination. For a short time the chase is kept up with a vigor and enthusiasm, which amaze the ordinary class of mortals, and leave competition at a distance; but their preternatural energy soon relaxes, and ultimately dies away, till it is revived by some other caprice, and starts off in a new direction.

This fickleness of character is doubtless in many cases constitutional, but it is often promoted, if not engendered, by an imperfect education, which has suffered the youthful mind to form its most important associations by chance. Hence the man not only becomes variable in his moods, but suffers from the vacillation arising out of the simultaneous importunities of desires which are incompatible. Thrown in childhood amidst multiform characters and circumstances, his mind has been made up of impressions without any regulating principle to keep them in just subordination, or modify their effects. Happiness must be held on a precarious tenure by a man, who is thus subject to the opposite influence of inconsistent attractions, and who is continually liable to have his tranquillity ruffled and his purposes disturbed by some novel event or contact with some new character. With a mind full of associations which can be acted upon by impulses the most contrary, he is the slave of circumstances, which seem to snatch the guidance of his conduct out of his own hands, and impel him forward, till other events overpower their influence, and having usurped the same ascendancy exercise the same despotism. Such fickleness of charac-

ter can be avoided only by acting on fixed principles and determinate aims, not to be abandoned in the transient humors which every day brings and every day sees expire. Man, amidst the fluctuations of his own feelings and of passing events, ought to resemble the ship, which currents may carry and winds may impel from her course, but which amidst every deviation still presses onward to her port with unremitted perseverance. In the coolness of reflection, he ought to survey his affairs with a dispassionate and comprehensive eye, and having fixed on his plan, take the necessary steps to accomplish it, regardless of the temporary mutations of his mind, the monotony of the same track, the apathy of exhausted attention, or the blandishments of new projects.

The folly of sacrificing settled purposes to transient humors cannot be kept too steadily in view. In a man of susceptible mind these moods of feeling often chase each other in rapid succession; and if he is also a wise man, it will powerfully restrain their influence on his actions, to reflect, that next month, or next week, or even to-morrow, he will experience nothing of the melancholy, or vexation, or ardor, or desire, which predominates to-day. He should therefore make his considerate determination the fixed point round which his passions, and feelings, and humors might play, with as little power to move it as the clouds possess on the steadfastness of Skiddaw.

The place of such a consistent perseverance, as here described, is in many individuals supplied by a devoted attachment to some particular pursuit; and although this strong determination of the taste may cause absurdities in the character, it is perhaps on the whole conducive to happiness. A man with such a bias is surely happier than he who is perpetually subject to fickleness of taste

and passion; or he who spends life in the vacuity arising from the want of a definite purpose. As instincts supply the place of knowledge, so does such a decided partiality produce many of the good effects of a perseverance in designs formed on mature and comprehensive reflection.

NOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS.

Note A. Page 11.

This argument is so ingeniously put in the following passage, which I met with after the publication of the first edition of the present work, that I am happy in the opportunity to present it to my readers, especially as it also coincides with the practical application of the doctrine in the sequel of this esay:

'One thing there is which, verily, I could never understand but to be altogether void of reason. That he who is thought to have taught something false and impious should be forced to recant, which if he do, he shall not be punished. To what purpose, I pray you, serves this practice? What good is there gotten, if for the avoiding of punishment, against his conscience, an heretic should recant his opinion? There is only one thing that may be alleged for it; *viz.* that such as are possessed of the same error, and unknown perhaps, will do the like in their own hearts, yea, will counsel others to do the same. That opinion must needs have a very light impression, which can so easily be plucked out of men's minds. Have we no reason to suspect that such a recantation is rather for fear of punishment than from the heart? Will there not rather much heart-burning by this means arise, if the magistrates shall seem not only to kill the body, but to plot the ruin of the soul? Are we, indeed, so ill furnished with weapons to vanquish error, as to be forced to defend ourselves with a lie, to put our trust in recantations made through fear? But some may say, this is not what we desire, to force men to any kind of recantation, but that an heretic may acknowledge his error, not so much with his mouth as with his heart. This were excellent, indeed, if these could bring him to it. But what work is there for threats or blandishments in this case? These

have some power, indeed, to prevail with the will, but thy business is with the understanding; it is changed neither by threats, nor flatteries, nor allurements. These cannot cause that what formerly seemed true should now seem false, though the party may very much desire to change his judgment, which, if it seem a new and wonderful thing to thee, I shall not need many arguments to convince thee of the truth thereof. You suppose that a man may change his judgment when he will, without any new reason to persuade him to think otherwise. I deny that he can do so. Make you, therefore, an experiment upon yourself, and see if you can for the least space of time draw yourself to think otherwise than you do in the question between us, so as to make yourself believe as I do, 'that a man cannot change his judgment when he pleases,' without question you shall find that you cannot do it. But take heed you mistake not an imagination for a persuasion, for nothing hinders but that thou mayest imagine that thou wilt. I pray thee likewise to consider again, that in case thou fear any thing, as for example, lest any business may not have a good issue, lest something should come to pass much against thy mind, so that thou canst not sleep for the trouble thereof, thou need but change thy opinion concerning such a thing, so as to hope that all will be well, and thy trouble shall be at an end. O most easie and ready medicine to take away the greatest part of that trouble of mind which men sustain in this life! O short philosophy! if whatsoever evil a man shall fear may betide him, he may believe (if he will) that it will not come to pass; whatsoever molests a man, because he takes it to be an evil, (when as oft times there is no evil in such a thing,) he may persuade himself when he pleases that it is not an evil. But experience show that none of these things can be.' — *Satan's Stratagems*, by Acontius or Aconzio, translated by John Goodwin, 1648.

I am indebted for the above extract to the Monthly Repository, No. 188, page 458.

Note B. Page 44.

There are people in the world, and people even of intelligence, who are afraid of associating with others of opposite opinions to their own, or of reading books in which such opinions are maintained; and they justify their fears by alleging, that they wish to avoid the contamination of their minds; that no one can associate with free-thinkers without having his faith shaken, or with republicans with-

out some inroads on his veneration for monarchy. It is true enough, as we have had occasion to observe in the text, that our opinions are greatly influenced by our associates; but it is those opinions only which have been instilled into our minds without any examination on our part, or which have never assumed a distinct and definite form; which we have never analyzed, and which we cannot trace from any rational premises. Whatever therefore may be said in justification of such fears on the part of the illiterate, no man who professes to think for himself, or to be an inquirer after truth, can consistently be afraid of any arguments, any opinions To him they are subjects of examination, and he rejoices if he finds in them a new principle. They can come to form part of his own opinions only by their clearness and cogency. Before any proposition can be received into his mind as true, it must appear to him logically deduced from undeniable premises. What is there, therefore, in any opinion, which can cause him a moment's alarm? If it comes before him without proper evidence it makes no impression; if it is supported by irresistible proof he has gained a new truth. What possible evil then can arise from subjecting his mind to the operation of any arguments whatever?

It is different in the case of the imagination, or, in other words, with ideas connected by other than logical relations, with those mere conceptions which are continually rising in the mind. The evil of a false argument is not in its being perceived by the understanding, but in its being regarded as true: hence the perception of its fallacy annihilates its influence, and, however often it may occur to the recollection, it is perfectly harmless; but in the case of horrid or disgusting images, it is the mere conception of them which constitutes the evil, and the most thorough insight into their character cannot remedy the mischief.

Hence, while he who has formed his conclusions for himself, and clearly sees their dependance on indubitable evidence, is unaffected in his opinions amidst the thickest warfare of sophistry, and comes unharmed out of the contest, a man of the most virtuous disposition and the purest intentions is at the mercy, as it regards his imagination, of the ideas oftenest presented to him, and can hardly escape contamination from a frequent exhibition of such as are unseemly and improper.

For these reasons, a man of thought, although he would forfeit the character of a philosopher, and deserve the pity if not the contempt

of every inquirer after truth, by evincing the slightest fear of any arguments, by avoiding any book, lest it should produce a change in his opinions, would be perfectly justified in shunning such company or such writings as have a tendency to pervert the imagination. In the one case he can receive no impression which he can have any proper reason for avoiding; in the other he is exposed to disgusting or degrading images, which, when they have once become familiar, may intrude amidst the purest and most serious meditations.

Note C. Page 50.

I have left the foot-note to the text in this page exactly as it appeared in the first edition; but it by no means solves the whole of the question, why we are apt to take greater offence at an endeavor to subvert part of our creed, than at an attempt to enlarge it by further additions. It must be partly accounted for by the fact, that our affections attach themselves to a doctrine as well as to any external object. If early and deeply fixed, a multitude of interesting associations naturally gather round it; it becomes endeared to us by being connected with pleasurable circumstances, the rallying point of pleasant thoughts. We are alarmed and indignant, therefore, at any design to shake its validity: the removal of it from our minds would be the destruction of a whole system of associations, and perhaps active habits, of which it is the nucleus or centre; the bare suggestion of its being erroneous infuses all the inquietude of doubt, and obstructs the course of our habitual thoughts and feelings, and our first impulse is to resent the attack. But it is obvious that a new article of faith, which suffers our old opinions to remain, and merely offers something additional to our thoughts, produces none of these effects. It overturns no superstructure of association; it interposes no chasm in the regular track of our imagination, no sudden hiatus in the circle of our feelings, no doubts to impede our intellectual movements. It occasions therefore no alarm, and no resentment, no laceration of mind (to borrow an expression of Dr. Johnson's), while it inspires that self-complacency attendant on a perception of the superiority of our own views.

In the Essay on the Influence of Reason on the Feelings, we have shown how liable the mind is, in certain circumstances, to the recurrence of these feelings, even in opposition to the convictions of the understanding. It seems to have been a similar view of the subject, arising probably from his own consciousness and experience (for we

all know how tenaciously his early prejudices clung to his mind), which led Dr. Johnson to maintain, in the passage which supplied the expression just quoted, that no reliance could be placed on a conversion from the Roman Catholic to the Protestant faith.

'A man,' he observes, 'who is converted from Protestantism to Popery, may be sincere: he parts with nothing: he is only superadding to what he already had. But a convert from Popery to Protestantism gives up so much of what he has held as sacred as any thing that he retains, there is so much *laceration of mind* in such a conversion, that it can hardly be sincere and lasting.'

We may trace to the same source, namely, to the pleasurable ideas and emotions which gather round a doctrine, those frequent declamations which we hear against cold reasoning and hard-hearted logic, and pathetic appeals to one part of our nature against the other. An original thinker, a reformer in moral science, will thus often appear a hard and insensible character. He goes beyond the feelings and associations of the age; he leaves them behind him; he shocks our old prejudices: it is reserved for a subsequent generation, to whom his views have been unfolded from their infancy, and in whose minds all the interesting associations have collected round them, which formerly encircled the exploded opinions, to regard his discoveries with unmingled pleasure. Hence an author, who aspires after popularity, must not project his powers in advance of the age; but throw them back amongst the recollections and associations of past times.

Note D. Page 54.

Many good men, who have wished to be liberal to such as differed from them in opinion, have perplexed themselves as to the extent to which their liberality should be carried. Some, with the inconclusiveness of conscientious feeling, combined with feeble powers of logical deduction, have sagely inferred that it ought not to be carried too far, while others, in the true spirit of persecution, have denounced any indulgence to important differences as spurious liberality.

The principles unfolded in the present work relieve us from all difficulty on this point. True liberality consists in not imputing to others any moral turpitude, because their opinions differ from our own. It does not consist in ostensibly yielding to the opinions of others; in refraining from a rigorous examination of their soundness, or from detecting and exposing the fallacies which they involve; but

in regarding those who hold them as free from consequent culpability, and abstaining from casting upon them that moral odium, with which men have been ready in all ages to overwhelm such as deviated in the least from the miserable compound of truth and error, which they hugged to their own bosoms.

Note E. Page 62.

It is not often that we can meet with any direct arguments against the utility of truth — at least in a quarter which entitles them to attention. The following passage, therefore, from the Edinburgh Review may be considered of some value, as a specimen of what can be alleged against the doctrine. It shows the feebleness of acknowledged talent when engaged on the side of sophistry.

The extract is from a Review of Belsham's Elements of the Philosophy of the Mind.

'Mr. Belsham has one short argument, that whatever is true cannot be hurtful. It is the motto of his title-page, and is afterwards repeated with equal emphasis, at every time of need. 'If the doctrine be true,' he contends, 'the diffusion of it can do no harm. It is an established and undeniable principle, that truth must be favorable to virtue.' To us, however, this principle, instead of being undeniable, has always appeared the most questionable of postulates. In the declamation of Cato, or the poetry of Akenside, we admit it with little scruple, because we do not read Plato or Akenside for the truths they may chance to contain ; but we always feel more than scepticism, when we are assailed by it in a treatise of pure philosophy : nor can we account for an almost universal assent it has received, from any other circumstance than the profession and habits of the first teachers of morals in our schools, and of the greater number of their successors. It was a maxim of religion, before it became a maxim of philosophy ; though, even as a religious maxim, it formed a very inconsistent part of the optimism in which it was combined. The Deity wills happiness ; he loves truth : truth therefore must be productive of good. Such is the reasoning of the optimist. But he forgets, that, in his system, error too must have been *beneficial*, because error *has been ;* and that the employment of falsehood for the production of good cannot be more unworthy of the Divine Being, than the acknowledged employment of rapine and murder for the same purpose. There is, therefore, nothing in the abstract consideration of truth and Deity, which jus-

tifies the adoption of such a maxim ; and as little is it justified by our practical experience. In the small events of that familiar and hourly intercourse, which forms almost the whole of human life, how much is happiness increased by the general adoption of a system of concerted and limited deceit ; for it is either in that actual falsehood, which must, as falsehood, be productive of evil, or in the suppression of that truth, which, as truth, must have been productive of good, that the chief happiness of civilized *manners* consists ; and he from whose doctrine it flows, that we are to be in no case hypocrites, would, in mere manners, reduce us to a degree of barbarism beyond that of the rudest savage, who, in the simple hospitalities of his hut, or the ceremonial of the public assemblies of his tribe, has still some courtesies, which he fulfils with all the exactness of polite dissimulation. In the greater events of life, how often might the advantage of erroneous belief be felt ! If, for example, it were a superstition of every mind, that the murderer, immediately on the perpetration of his guilt, must himself expire by sympathy, a new motive would be added to the side of virtue ; and the only circumstance to be regretted would be, not that the falsehood would produce effect, since that effect would be only serviceable, but that perhaps the good effect would not be of long duration, as it would be destroyed for ever by the rashness of the first daring experimenter. The visitation of the murderer by the nightly ghost, which exists in the superstition of so many countries, and which forms a great part of that complex and unanalyzed horror with which the crime continues to be considered after the belief of the superstition itself has ceased, has probably been of more service to mankind than the truths of all the sermons, that have been preached on the corresponding prohibition in the Decalogue. It is unfortunate, that with this beneficial awe unnecessary horrors have been connected ; for the *place* continues to be haunted, as well as the *person ;* and the dread of our infancy is thus directed, rather to the supernatural appearance than to the crime. But if superstition could exist, and be modified, at the will of an enlightened legislator, so as to be deprived of its terrors to the innocent, and turned wholly against the guilty, we know no principle of our nature on which it would be so much for the interest of mankind to operate. It would be a species of prohibitive religion, more impressive, at the moment of beginning crime, than religion itself ; because its penalties would be more conceivable and immediate. Innumerable cases may be imagined, in

which other errors of belief would be of moral advantage; and we may therefore assume, as *established and undeniable*, that there is nothing in the nature of truth which makes it *necessarily* good; that in the greater number of instances, truth is beneficial; but that, of the whole number of truths and falsehoods, a certain number are productive of good, and others of evil. To which number any particular truth or falsehood belongs, must be shown, in the usual way, by reasonings of direct experience or analogy; and hence, *in a question of utility*, the demonstration of mere logical truth cannot justly be adduced as superseding the necessity of other inquiries. Even though the contrary of that postulate, which Mr. Belsham has assumed, could not have been shown from *other* cases, it would not *therefore* have been applicable, without proof, to the great questions which he discusses; for these questions comprehend all the truths that are of most importance in human life, which are thus the very truths from which the justness of the assumed principle is most fully to be demonstrated or denied.'

It may be remarked in the first place, that this argument begins by confounding two essentially different things, the veracity of men and the knowledge of truth. The advantages of a system of conventional simulation and dissimulation we may pass over with the remark, that if it is really beneficial to society, it is so exactly in proportion as its character is accurately appreciated by those engaged in it. Where it is perfectly well understood, as it generally is, it does the least harm, and produces the most benefit. If any individual is deceived by it, if he misconstrues the current professions of social intercourse in their literal sense, he usually suffers for his error, which proves, that, even in this case, a knowledge of the truth is a necessary protection against evil.

Dismissing, however, the consideration of veracity, let us proceed to the real question, whether truth is beneficial, and examine the arguments adduced in support of the negative.

The writer of the passage appears from first to last to proceed on the principle, that the true consequences of evil actions are not the most efficacious motives to deter men from committing those actions, but that it is useful for them to apprehend other and more alarming results, consequences of greater magnitude, capable of producing more vivid impressions on the imagination: that since mankind do not always act from a conviction of what is best, but from the predominant appetite or passion of the moment, it is expedient to call

in the aid of some counter passion, founded on false views, whose influence shall operate in the direction which the most enlightened judgment would point out. The first thing which strikes the mind in this view of the matter, is the needlessness of any extraneous motives in cases which have an abundant supply within themselves. If human actions are morally bad only in proportion as they are pernicious to society, and to the agent himself, a perfect knowledge of their consequences seems to be all that is requisite to deter him from them; and to excite a dread of something more terrible would be a superfluous and wanton pressure on the feelings. We may admit, nevertheless, for our present purpose, that any groundless fears, which served to corroborate the effect of just apprehensions would be so far useful; but whether they were absolutely beneficial would obviously depend on their not being necessarily accompanied by circumstances of an opposite character, and of greater moment. That they would be inevitably attended by circumstances of this latter description, both in the instances supposed by the writer before us and in every consistently imaginable instance, I shall endeavor to show as succinctly as the subject permits.

An apprehension of false consequences must evidently be founded on an incorrect knowledge of facts, or on wrong inferences from facts accurately ascertained. In either case the existence of the error implies a state of ignorance, and, if it regards actions important to mankind, ignorance of a deep and dangerous character.

Let us take, for instance, the first case imagined by the critic; let us suppose the universal prevalence of the belief, that a murderer would expire by sympathy immediately on the commission of the crime. The mass of moral and physical ignorance and misconception which must exist to support a belief of this nature in any society, cannot fail to rise before the understanding of every one who reflects a moment on the subject. It is not to be supposed that mankind could be involved in so gross an error, while they were in other respects at all enlightened. On the contrary, its prevalence would imply a total ignorance of the laws of animal life, of the phenomena of the human mind, of the rules of evidence, and the principles of reasoning, a blindness in the human race to every thing within and without them. These would be necessary conditions for the bare existence of so absurd a doctrine; they would be essential to its support, and would give birth to a multitude of evils infinitely greater than any which it would prevent. Although no clandestine

assassinations might be committed, a thousand public butcheries would probably take place, executions for witchcraft, human sacrifices, self-immolations, legal murders for heresy and dissent. The mischief would be without assignable limits. Laws restrictive of innocent or beneficial actions, gloomy superstitions, absurd customs, fanatical rites, wars of vengeance, slavery scarcely conscious of its own baseness, some or all of these would be the inevitable accompaniments, sooner or later, of such an erroneous belief. Even supposing the delusion to exist amongst a gentle and harmless race, who were free from the grossest of the evils here enumerated, such a state of society could never be secure from them. There is no barrier against the irruption of the evils of ignorance but true knowledge. Hence the peaceable, the almost happy condition in which uncivilized nations may occasionally be found, is a state of fragile tranquillity, liable to be crushed from without or shattered from within by those spontaneous ebullitions of caprice and enthusiasm, against which the human mind has no security but in the full light of science and reason. What principles, amidst such ignorance, could prove a defence against any absurdity which a man of cunning and audacity might find his advantage in maintaining? At the mercy of impostors and fanatics, or of that mongrel race which partakes of the complexion of both,* such a society would be in continual danger of an intestine ferment, which (if I may borrow an image from an exploded doctrine) might at any time burst out into the equivocal generation of vice and misery.

This writer must have had strange views of the nature of the human mind, and have made little use of the lessons to be gathered from the history of the race, to suppose, what is necessarily implied in his arguments, that a gross error could exist independent and insulated, deprived of all its pernicious relations and accompaniments, stripped of its power in every way, except in that particular direction which he has chosen to imagine.

He seems to have fallen into the common practice of looking only at a single direct and immediate consequence of the error, unconscious of the necessity of expanding his view over the whole circle of its influence and connections. A single appeal to our own consciousness, a single glance at our fellow-men, suffices to show that one doctrine is necessarily connected with other doctrines; that when one truth is established, other dependent truths, spring up around

* 'Fingunt, simul creduntque.' — TACITUS.

it; that for any given error to prevail, a number of other errors must prevail at the same time. This is the reason universally applicable why error, taking in the whole of its concomitants and consequences, never can be beneficial. It never can have a preponderance of good effects, because its existence implies related, collateral, co-ordinate errors, and is incompatible with that completeness of knowledge and perfection of reason, which are indispensable to the highest degree of human happiness.

The other hypothetical case adduced is exposed to the same arguments. Assuming that a belief in apparitions really operates to prevent murders, we have on the one hand a good attained, and on the other we have, as in the former case, all the error and ignorance which such a belief implies, with their incalculable train of pernicious consequences, which it is unnecessary to recapitulate. The argument is already abundantly conclusive. If a false apprehension of consequences in these important cases would be accompanied by the evils which we have endeavored to show would be inseparable from it, the assistance which it might furnish in deterring from crime would be a subordinate consideration. But it is by no means evident that it would lend any assistance worth regarding. The whole good accomplished is not to be placed to the account of the error; it is only the superiority of its efficacy in deterring from the crime, over the salutary influence of those other circumstances which would operate in the same direction, if such a belief did not exist. The natural horror at taking the life of a fellow-creature, the infamy of detection, the vengeance of society, and the other necessary or probable consequences of the deed, would still be left to produce their effect; and it would be difficult to show, that the addition of an absurd belief would materially enhance the motives to abstain from this consummation of wickedness. It may be even questioned whether the power of the motives would not be impaired, when it is considered that such a belief would be incompatible with that clear view of all the real consequences of the crime which an enlightened mind can alone fully possess, and which, except under the despotism of some passion that puts all consequences out of sight, would be sufficient to save any individual from a deed so irreparably destructive of his own happiness. We must recollect, too, that it is one of the beneficial effects of a clear and correct view of the consequences of actions to dispossess passion of this power, and that the tempest which obscures the intellectual vision is most likely

to arise, and produce its melancholy results, in a mind already clouded by error and ignorance.

To all these considerations it may be added, that a morality founded on the exhibition of false consequences to the imagination is insecure and unstable. The delusion is constantly open to suspicion and exposure. The imputed consequences are often obscurely felt, if not clearly seen, to be fictitious, and a degree of practical scepticism is induced, which destroys their influence on the conduct without replacing it by motives of a higher, because of a more rational character.

On the whole, the philosophy of the critic reminds one strongly of the profound policy of those mothers, who raise up dark and dismal images of dustmen, beggars, chimney-sweeps, and other nursery bugbears, to enforce their authority over unmanageable children; nor is the one entitled to less credit and clemency than the other. To the principles of the philosopher and the conduct of the parent an equal tribute of admiration is due, and the errors which the former commends in theory are just as well adapted to raise mankind to the dignity and happiness of rational beings, as those which the latter reduces into practice.

After this general view of the subject, which is sufficient to expose the futility of these and all similar objections to the doctrine which teaches the necessary perniciousness of error, it is scarcely perhaps worth while to descend to a minuter scrutiny of the logical blunder committed by the critic in his elaborate eulogium on the hypothetical utility of spectres. I have regarded rather the general scope of his reasoning, than the form into which he has put it. Yet, it is too curious an instance of the slips of sophistry to be entirely passed over. 'If,' says he, 'superstition could exist, and be modified, at the will of an enlightened legislator, so as to be deprived of its terrors to the innocent, and turned wholly against the guilty, we know no principle of our nature, on which it would be so much for the interest of mankind to operate.' He then proceeds to draw the conclusion, that therefore error is not necessarily injurious, 'that there is nothing in the nature of truth which makes it necessarily good.' This is surely one of the strangest pieces of reasoning ever hazarded. Had the critic alleged, that superstition *could* be modified at the will of an enlightened legislator, and rendered serviceable to mankind, then, however the proposition might be disputed, there would have been some coherence of argument in proceeding to

say, that therefore it is not necessarily hurtful, but to say that *if* it could be so modified it would be highly beneficial, and that therefore it is not necessarily injurious, is a perfect instance of inconsequential reasoning. From merely conditional or hypothetical premises, he has drawn a positive and absolute conclusion. It is as if any one should contend, that arsenic is not necessarily poisonous; because, if it could be received into the stomach without injury it would not be destructive of life. In a word, the writer does not say, that if A were equal to B and B equal to C, then A and C would be equal; but in utter defiance of rules of logic and forms of reasoning, if A were equal to B and B to C, therefore A and C are equal.

He has, it is true, interposed another sentence between the premises and the conclusion, which we have here brought together, and it may perhaps be imagined, that the inference deduced was meant to be drawn from this intermediate proposition. To suppose this, however, would be to presume that the author had taken the trouble of inventing instances, and had then dismissed them without applying them to the purpose for which he had tasked his invention. If this indeed were true, if the sentence in question, namely 'innumerable cases may be imagined in which other errors of belief may be of moral advantage,' were to be considered as the proposition on which the conclusion depends, the formal logical absurdity would certainly be got quit of, but only to be replaced by a substantial error equally glaring. The argument would then amount to this, that if we can imagine a thing to exist without its essential properties, it is a proof that they are not essential; a principle which carries its own refutation along with it. We have already seen what, in the case of error, these essential properties are. It was the province of the critic to show, either by reasoning from admitted principles or by the induction of facts, that properties of this kind are not necessarily connected with it, and not to content himself with asserting that they might be separated in imagination. Error may certainly be imagined in one sense to prevail without attendant evil, just as lead may be conceived to float in water; but what should we say to the natural philosopher, who contended that the metal is not necessarily the heavier substance, because we may imagine it to possess buoyancy when placed in the liquid?

Perhaps more than enough has been said in reply to this vindication of error, but the principle involved so well deserves a complete

elucidation, that the prolixity of the present note will be excused. From the internal evidence afforded by the style and matter of the article in the Edinburgh Review, from which the passage here commented on is extracted, one would suspect it to have proceeded from the pen of the late Dr. Thomas Brown. If so, he lived to outgrow such philosophy, for passages of an opposite tendency might easily be quoted from his subsequent writings. Here, it is evident he was only trying his wings, and he seems to have been more ambitious to display the brilliancy of the plumage than to prove the strength of the pinions; more intent on showing the grace and agility of his evolutions than the boldness and precision of his flight.

Note F. Page 75.

It is an interesting inquiry, what are those circumstances which form the best external criterion of the truth of a doctrine, or under which there is the greatest probability of its being true?

In answer to this question, I think it may be said, that we have the best test of the truth of any doctrine, the greatest possible assurance which external circumstances can give, when it is universally believed amidst the fullest liberty of scrutinizing its pretensions. If both these circumstances do not concur, the doctrine may be pronounced doubtful. The universal belief of a doctrine is no argument for its truth, if dissent and controversy are prohibited. And on the other hand, if a doctrine is believed by only a part of those who have examined it, although the fullest freedom of inquiry prevails, it may be considered as not grounded on satisfactory evidence; or at least that the evidence in favor of it has not been hitherto exhibited in all its force. If this is true, it necessarily follows, that to protect a doctrine from examination, is to exclude that combination of circumstances which constitutes the best external evidence, and gives us the greatest possible assurance of its validity.

Note G. Page 75.

A very opposite confirmation of this remark may be found in the following letter from Dr. Reid to Dr. Gregory: 'It would be want of candor not to own, that I think there is some merit in what you are pleased to call *my philosophy;* but I think it lies chiefly in having called in question the common theory of *ideas* or *images of things in the mind,* being the only objects of thought; a theory founded on natural prejudices, and so universally received as to be interwoven

with the structure of language. Yet were I to give you a detail of what led me to call in question this theory, after I had long held it as self-evident and unquestionable, you would think, as I do, that there was much of chance in the matter. The discovery was the birth of time, not of genius ; and BERKELEY and HUME did more to bring it to light than the man that hit upon it. I think there is hardly any thing that can be called *mine* in the philosophy of the mind, which does not follow with ease from the detection of this prejudice.

'I must, therefore, beg of you most earnestly to make no contrast in my favor to the disparagement of my predecessors in the same pursuit. I can truly say of them, and shall always avow, what you are pleased to say of me, that but for the assistance I have received from their writings I never could have wrote or thought what I have done.' — *Life of Dr. Reid, by Dugald Stewart*, page 122.

NOTE H. Page 78.

It may perhaps be argued, that although a man might be presumptuous in maintaining that he himself was infallible in his opinions, or in setting up his own belief as a criterion of truth, yet he may without such presumption, nay even with great modesty and diffidence in his own faculties, repose implicit confidence in the infallibility of another, and act upon it accordingly. But on strict examination it will be found, that he who acts on the infallibility of another, proceeds also on the assumption of his own infallibility ; for the conclusion that the other party is infallible is necessarily the judgment of his own understanding, and it is therefore, at the bottom, on the judgment of his own understanding that he acts.

Whether we assert a doctrine to be true from our own views of it, or whether we assert the opinions of others concerning it to be correct, we are equally laying down a judgment of our own ; a judgment, in the one case directly on a doctrine, in the other case on the correctness of other people's views, but in both cases equally a conclusion of our own minds : and if we at any time act on the assumption, that such a conclusion cannot possibly be wrong, we take for granted our own infallibility.

A similar position, namely, that whoever maintains the infallibility of another person, does in reality maintain the same of himself, is thus illustrated in a letter from the eccentric author of Sandford and Merton.

'I cannot help,' says he, 'digressing here to propose a curious argument, derived from this principle, against the church of Rome; which I do not remember to have seen. He that asserts the infallibility of another, must also assert his own; otherwise he may be deceived in the judgment he makes of that infallibility, as well as in any other judgment. But if he allow that all his own judgments are fallible, and may be erroneous, then his particular opinion of the infallibility may be erroneous too, unless he can show a particular reason for the exception. In this manner it may be shown, that the real confidence every man has in his own judgment is much the same, since it must always precede his having a confidence in any one else.' *

Thus no one can escape from the necessity of ultimately relying and acting on his own judgment. Even in the case of that apparently utter prostration of mind, in which a man regards a fellow-creature, or a number of fellow-creatures, as above the reach of error, it is still the same. Such a state of mind implies a greater degree of rashness and presumption than is generally imagined; for what an extensive comprehension of human nature, and the affairs of the world, and the relations of man to all around him, would be necessary before even the grounds of such an opinion could be brought together!

Note I. Page 89.

It must be observed, that we are treating the matter as a question of policy, not of morality, that is, we are inquiring whether it is expedient to allow an unlimited freedom of publication, not under what circumstances men are justified in availing themselves of that liberty. On the latter point, however, we may be here permitted to offer two remarks.

1. It is a consequence of the principles in the text, that he who publishes his opinions, however erroneous they may ultimately prove to be, is conferring, as far as it is in his power, a benefit on society, provided he communicates them in a proper manner. There is as much merit in the publication of an opinion which is false, as in that of an opinion which is true, other circumstances being the same, and the publisher in each instance having the same conviction that he is promulgating truth.

* Letter from Mr. Day, in Memoirs of R. L. Edgeworth, vol. ii. p. 89.

2. It is also a remark of some importance, that in the expression and publication of opinions, the opinions themselves are not the only things manifested. Various moral as well as intellectual qualities are displayed. Truth itself may be urged in rude and indecorous language, with base and malevolent feelings. Such manifestations of bad passions are of course worthy of moral reprehension, in whatever cause they are employed. Whether they appear in connection with true or false doctrines, is a circumstance perfectly immaterial, and which can neither extenuate nor aggravate their culpability. The morality of the press is a subject worthy of some able pen. The public sentiment wants rousing and directing against a variety of acts, which although viewed with apathy when committed through the medium of the press, would not be a moment tolerated in private society.

Note K. Page 95.

The principles developed and established in the two preceding essays form the proper basis of that liberty, which has passed under the several names of toleration, religious liberty, and liberty of conscience; the liberty of worshipping God in the way which approves itself to the judgment of each individual, without incurring any pain, loss, or disability.

The grounds for interfering with this liberty may be supposed of several kinds: first, to protect the honor of God; secondly, to punish erroneous opinions; thirdly, to prevent those opinions from spreading.

The first object is evidently not proper for human interference. The very supposition of our ability to accomplish it, involves a similar error to that of the anthropomorphites, a reduction of the Deity to the nature and constitution of man. But if it were a proper object, who shall judge between two individuals, or two sects, which has adopted the form of worship, and the doctrines most agreeable to the dignity of the Eternal Being? Or again, if one body of men could infallibly know that they were in the right, how could they possibly do honor to God, or protect him from dishonor, by forcing upon their fellow-creatures a form and manner of worship which they could not conscientiously adopt, or even by suppressing creeds and observances of an erroneous nature? To attempt the former would be proceeding on one of the most monstrous suppositions, which ever entered into the human imagination, that the Supreme Being could be pleased with hypocrisy and insincerity; nor

would it be much more rational to endeavor to effect the latter. If a man entertains any doctrine derogatory to the character of the Deity, the only way to remove it from his creed is to address ourselves to his understanding. To forbid the expression of that doctrine, as it cannot extirpate it from the mind, is doing God no honor, for in what possible way can the expression of a thought derogatory to his character dishonor him more than the thought itself? In every view, then, the object of protecting the honor of the Deity should have no place in human regulations. It is far beyond their reach, and ought to be sacred from their presumption.

With regard to the second object, the punishment of erroneous opinions, its absurdity has been sufficiently exposed. It would be the punishment of innocence for no possible good. The only object of restrictions on the liberty of worship, that can be maintained with a show of reason, is the third. This liberty can come under the cognizance of the legislator only as a mode of propagating opinions. The manner in which a man worships God, provided it involves no breach of moral duty, cannot affect the community in any other way; and all the arguments which have been adduced, in favor of perfect freedom of public discussion, are of equal force in favor of perfect freedom of worship. But there are some peculiar evils attending restrictions on the latter. A person may entertain an opinion, and yet not feel under any conscientious obligation to express it; but he who thinks a certain form of worship right, feels an obligation to adopt it. Restraint, therefore, even were it submitted to, would produce much secret misery. But in general it would not be submitted to. In the mind of such a one, there would be what he considered as his duty to God opposed to his duty to men, and he must of course prefer the former, or be degraded in his moral feelings. Either way the community must suffer: it must be either disturbed by the resistance of some of its members to the authority of the state, and the consequent excitation of a thousand malignant passions, or injured by destroying their moral integrity, by hardening the conscience and debasing the character.

And what, after all, would be attained by these imbecile restrictions? The only thing which they could accomplish, if they were attended by perfect success, would be uniformity of worship and profession. But this might be either a good or an evil. A uniformity in religious observances, forms and doctrines, which were in all respects true and proper, and in the adoption and profession

of which every individual was sincere, would be a good; but a uniformity in those which were not in all respects true and proper, and in the adoption and profession of which many of the community would be acting a feigned part, is the only uniformity which restraints could secure, and that would be an evil. It would be far better to have a variety than a sameness of error, because there would be a better prospect of attaining truth by the collision of opinions; and that it would be infinitely preferable to have a variety of professions according to actual belief, than a uniformity of professions not sincere, it would be an insult to any mind of common moral feeling to attempt to prove.

The true grounds, the grand principles of toleration, or (to avoid a term which men ought never to have been under the necessity of employing) of religious liberty and liberty of conscience, are thus the principles which it was the object of the two preceding essays to establish — that opinions are involuntary, and involve no merit or demerit, and that the free publication of opinions is beneficial to society, because it is the means of arriving at truth. They are both founded on the unalterable nature of the human mind, and are sure, sooner or later, to be universally recognised and applied.

Under the general prevalence of these truths, society would soon present a different aspect. Every species of intolerance would vanish; because, how much soever it might be the interest of men to suppress opinions contrary to their own, there would be no longer any pretext for compulsion or oppression. Difference of sentiment would no longer engender the same degree of passion and ill-will. The irritation, virulence, and invective of controversy would be in a great measure sobered down into cool argumentation. The intercourse of private life would cease to be embittered by the odium of heterodoxy, and all the benevolent affections would have more room for expansion. Men would discover, that although their neighbors differed in opinion from themselves, they might possess equal moral worth, and equal claims to affection and esteem.

A difference in civil privileges, that eternal source of discontent and disorder, that canker in the happiness of society, which can be cured only by being exterminated, would be swept away, and in a few years a wonder would arise that rational beings could have been inveigled into its support.

Another important consequence would be, a more general union of mankind in the pursuit of truth. Since errors would no longer

be regarded as involving moral turpitude, every effort to obtain the grand object in view, however unsuccessful, would be received with indulgence, if not applause. There would be more exertion, because there would be more encouragement. If moral science has already gradually advanced, shackled as it has been by inveterate prejudices, what would be the rapidity of its march under a system, which, far from opposing obstacles, presented facilities to its progress.

Note L. Page 111.

The following is a singularly apposite illustration of the remarks in the text.

'The Emperors of China, her statesmen, her merchants, her people, and her *Philosophers* also, are all idolaters. For though many of the learned affect to despise the popular superstitions, and to deride all worship, except that paid to the great and visible objects of nature, heaven and the earth; yet their own system is incapable of raising them above that which they affect to contemn; and at the hour of death, finding that some god is necessary, and not knowing the true God, they send for the priests of false gods, to pray for their restoration to health, and for the rest of their spirits after dissolution, and a happy return to the world again. It is remarkable, that the *Yu-Keaou*, or sect of the learned, though in health they laugh at the fooleries of the more idolatrous sects; yet generally in sickness, in the prospect of death, and at funerals, employ the Ho-Chang and Tau-sze, to offer masses; recite the king (standard books, of a religious and moral kind, thus denominated;) write charms; ring bells; chaunt prayers; and entreat the gods. Admitting the influence which universal custom has over them in these things, we may, perhaps, also conclude, that they feel their own system uncomfortable to die with. In that awful hour, when 'heart and flesh fail,' human beings generally feel the necessity of resorting to some system, either true or false, which professes to afford any hope of escaping or mitigating those evils, which a consciousness of sin compels them to fear, and of attaining that happiness, the desire of which is 'identified with our nature.' — *A Retrospect of the First Ten Years of the Protestant Mission to China*, by William Milne, p. 29–31.

ESSAY

ON

THE PURSUIT OF TRUTH,

IN REFERENCE CHIEFLY TO

THE DUTIES CONNECTED WITH IT.

PREFACE

TO THE SECOND EDITION.

The volume in which the two following Essays first appeared, in the year 1829, was on the whole favorably received; so much so, at least, as to be out of print in two or three years. The author has since been repeatedly urged, in various quarters, by strangers as well as friends, to publish another edition; a step which he has hitherto declined, partly on account of the tardy and limited encouragement extended to such works, but chiefly because he was dissatisfied with his principal Essay, as a less adequate view of the subject than he was capable of presenting, and he did not wish it to re-appear without such a complete revision as other studies prevented him for a season from bestowing upon it.

Within the last year, however, he has had an opportunity of performing this task. He has enlarged the Essay by additional considerations and arguments, and thrown the whole into a more systematic form, so as to be less unworthy, he trusts, of the great questions which it ventures to discuss.

In the second Essay, which is of inferior importance, he has not found it requisite to make any other alteration or addition worth notice than appending to it a few Notes.

Besides these two Essays, the original volume contained another, 'On the Fundamental Principle of all Evidence and Expectation,' not here reprinted. The reasons for the omission are, that it is a Treatise calculated for a different class of readers; and, more especially, that the author has not at present either the leisure or the inclination to give it that deliberate revisal which he conceives it to require. He may probably publish it hereafter, in an improved and expanded form, either alone or in company with other treatises more congruous with it in character than the two Essays which this brief explanation is intended to introduce.

January 29, 1844.

PREFACE

TO THE FIRST EDITION.

Few words will be necessary in introducing the present Volume to the Public.

Some of those who did the Author the honor of pronouncing a favorable judgment upon a former Essay of his on the Formation of Opinions, expressed at the same time a regret that he had passed too lightly over one very important part of the subject; namely, the conduct of men in the application of their means and faculties to the investigation of truth. While he had explained more or less to their satisfaction in what manner the mind is affected by the circumstances in which it is placed, and the inevitable determination of its views by the evidence presented to it, they thought that he had indicated in too cursory a way the duties of mankind in the collection and examination of that evidence, the effect of which, when once brought before the understanding, is so completely uncontrollable by the will.

In consequence of these suggestions, he applied himself to the subject, and produced the treatise on the Pursuit of Truth, which stands first in the volume, and which he presents to those who took an interest in his former Essay, in the hope that it may prove a not unacceptable companion to it.

In respect to the second Essay, he has only to offer a remark on its external appearance. It is, as the reader will observe, in Dialogue, a form not very frequently used by modern writers in the exposition of philosophical views, and adopted on the present occasion rather by way of experiment than from any opinion of its preferableness. After considering what has been said by Hurd and others on the employment of real or fictictious, ancient or modern names, he has preferred designating his speakers by simple letters, as being less repulsive to the taste than any other expedient, except that of using the names of eminent characters of past days, which he was precluded from adopting, because the opinions expressed in these conversations have reference to the actual times in which we live. This is a point after all of little importance in philosophical discussions, since the parts of the dialogue assigned to the different speakers are intended to exhibit opinions rather than character, and may be considered as only embodying in language the various views which successively present themselves to the same mind in reflecting on the subject selected.

The third Essay* embraces topics which the Author can scarcely hope will attract attention, except from that small number of intellectual men who have turned their thoughts to the consideration of the foundations of human knowledge, a subject included along with many others of vital, although unappreciated importance to Society, under the repulsive appellation of metaphysics. By these few, however, he ventures to hope that the treatise will be found of some interest, if not from the absolute originali-

* This Essay is omitted in the present edition as already stated in the new Preface, but the author did not conceive it needful to suppress this short notice of it.

ty of its views (on which it is not for him to pronounce), yet from the novelty and regularity of the order in which they are exhibited.

With regard to the whole of the Essays, he may venture to offer them to the Public, and particularly to the friends who have expressed so indulgent an opinion of his former volumes, as the result of long continued, if not always successful reflection. The greater part of the volume indeed was written out for the press four or five years ago, since which it has had the benefit of repeated scrunity and revision. He mentions these circumstances, not to disarm criticism or to preclude animadversion, but as establishing a title to a careful and candid examination from his readers, especially from those who may see reason to differ from the conclusions at which he has arrived.

March, 1829.

ESSAY

ON

THE PURSUIT OF TRUTH,

IN REFERENCE CHIEFLY TO

THE DUTIES CONNECTED WITH IT.

CHAPTER I.

IMPORTANCE OF TRUTH, AND OF OUR MORAL SENTIMENTS IN RELATION TO THE PURSUIT OF IT.

TRUTH, by which term is implied accuracy of knowledge and of inference, is necessarily conducive to the happiness of the human race. This is an assertion scarcely requiring in the present day to be either enforced or illustrated. That mankind are deeply concerned, not only in clearly understanding the properties of the material world, and of their own physical constitution, but in an accurate acquaintance with the operations of the human mind, the consequences of human actions, the results of social regulations, the effects of political institutions, the relations in which they themselves stand to other beings, and their real position in the universe, is a proposition so undeniable, when clearly expressed, as barely to escape the character of a truism.

The transcendent importance of this fulness and accuracy of knowledge is attested by the sad tale of error and

suffering presented to the eye in every page of history. What possible problem can mankind have to solve in their mutual intercourse but one? What is it, but to make themselves conjointly as happy, and, for that purpose, as noble-minded and virtuous as they can, during the short term of their mortal existence? And how have they hitherto solved this problem? In what numerous ways have they not proved themselves totally blind to their real interests, perverted their capabilities, wasted their resources, exasperated the unavoidable evils of their condition, and inflicted gratuitous wretchedness on each other and on themselves? It is clear that men can have no interest in suffering, no taste for misery, no preference for unhappiness in itself; and wherever they are found in a regular and systematic career after it, they must be laboring under an impression that they are in pursuit of a different object. It is error, therefore, it is ignorance, it is illusion, it is an incapacity on their part to see the real consequences of actions, the real issues of events, that gives rise to all those evils which desolate the world, except such as can be traced to irresistible impulse or to the physical circumstances of man's nature and condition.* 'Error is the universal cause of the misery of mankind,' are the first words of a distinguished philosopher,† in his treatise on the Search after Truth; and they are scarcely too unmeasured.

The various modes in which this consummation is effected meet us every where. In the rapid glance we are now taking we can hardly pause for particular illustrations; but perhaps a few instances may indicate the

* For a more extended discussion of the utility of truth and the mischievousness of error, the author would beg to refer to a former work of his, viz. 'Essays on the Formation and Publication of Opinions.'

† Malebranche.

nature of the evil in less compass, and with far greater suggestive power, than any general description. We are told by a high authority that amongst the superstitions of the Shetlanders, one is, or was, that he who saves a drowning man will receive at his hands some deep wrong or injury,* — a prejudice manifestly fatal to one of the noblest and most universal impulses of the human heart, and inevitably leading to acts of cowardly selfishness and cruelty.

A still more deadly prepossession exists among the Bechuanas in South Africa and all the Caffer tribes. They have no idea of the possibility of death except from hunger, or violence, or witchcraft. If a man die, even at the extreme age of ninety, without any appearance of perishing from hunger or violence, his death is imputed to sorcery; and blood is required to expiate or avenge it. 'This circumstance,' says the narrator, 'gives rise to indescribable scenes of slaughter and misery.'† It is reported by travellers that the superstition of the *evil-eye* prevails to a great extent in the present day, even amongst the highest classes, in Naples, where it occasions perpetual discord, insults, revenge, and even murder.‡

These instances are undoubtedly extreme cases, and, being alien from our own prejudices and habits, strike us all as palpable proofs of the connection between error and suffering; but if we look around us in our own community we shall find the connection as strongly illustrated by circumstances in which familiarity alone has prevented us from observing it.

* Memoirs of Sir Walter Scott, vol. iii. p. 155.

† Researches in South Africa, by Rev. John Philip, D.D., vol. ii. p. 120.

‡ See, among other testimonies, that of Sir David Wilkie, in the Memoirs of his Life, by A. Cunningham, vol. ii. p. 260.

The prevalence of misery, as the consequence of error and ignorance, proclaims the paramount importance of accurate knowledge. To discover truth is in reality to do good on a grand scale. The detection of an error, the dissipation of a doubt, the extirpation of a prejudice, the establishment of a fact, the deduction of a new inference, the development of a latent principle, may diffuse its beneficial consequences over every region of the world, and may be the means of lessening the misery or increasing the happiness of myriads of unborn generations.* The great interests of the human race, then, demand, that the way of discovery should be open, that there should be no obstructions to inquiry, that every possible facility and encouragement should be afforded to efforts addressed to the detection of error and to the attainment of truth, — nay, that every human being, as far as he is capable, should actively assist in the pursuit; and yet one of the greatest discouragements to such efforts at present existing amongst mankind is the state of their own moral sentiments. Although he who has achieved the discovery of a truth in a matter of importance, or rescued an admitted truth from insignificance and neglect,† may justly indulge the reflection that he has conferred a benefit on his fellow-men, to which even time itself can prescribe no limits, he will do well to prepare for the odium and persecution with which the benefit will be resisted, and

* 'Revolutions of ages,' says Milton, 'do not recover the loss of a rejected truth, for the want of which whole nations fare the worse.' — *Areopagitica.*

† 'In philosophy, equally as in poetry, genius produces the strongest impressions of novelty, while it rescues the stalest and most admitted truths from the impotence caused by the very circumstance of their universal admission.' — *Coleridge's Friend*, vol. i. p. 184.

console himself with a prospective reliance on the gratitude and sympathy of a future age.

It is impossible to deny the fact, that in some of the most important departments of knowledge the bulk of mankind regard novelties of doctrine — a description under which all detections of error and acquisitions of truth must come — as acts of moral turpitude or reprehensible arrogance, which they are ready to resent on the head of the promulgator.

A state of things, in which the real interests and the moral sentiments of the human race are thus placed in strong opposition, cannot fail to be fruitful of evil; and whoever should be fortunate enough to hasten its termination would perform no slight service to his species. On this point the past history of the world, although it affords little ground for vehement exultation, teaches no lesson of despair. In the progress of society men's moral sentiments inevitably change, both from those alterations in circumstances which enhance or depress the value of certain qualities of conduct, and from that acuter insight or correcter appreciation of the tendencies of action which accompanies an advance of civilization. From one or other of these causes, modes of conduct formerly regarded as of trivial moment grow into importance, qualities at one time extolled sink into dubious virtues, or even positive vices, acts once shunned are zealously performed and warmly approved, new duties are evolved from the novel situations in which men are placed, and the code of morality is amplified with rules which would have been unintelligible or undervalued at a previous period, because the circumstances to which they are applicable either had not then arisen or were wholly unregarded. Such changes may be seen by comparing either past times with present, or savage with civilized communities. The dexterous

horse-stealer, an ignominious felon in England, is the consummate hero of the Crow Indians.* How large the stride in moral sentiment from the blind and selfish superstition of the Shetlander, who runs away from the drowning seaman, to the enlightened benevolence which plants the life-boat on the sea-beach to succor the stranded ship, and stimulates such men as the noble-minded Pellew to plunge into the very midst of peril in order to rescue their fellow-creatures from destruction! †

In reference to that class of actions which are connected with the pursuit of truth, both these causes of change in moral sentiment have been in operation.

In the first place, circumstances have occurred which have greatly raised in importance the consequences of inquiry, and of course the consequences of the conduct exhibited in prosecuting it. So long as science and civilization had no existence, as mankind were solely occupied with providing for their physical wants, or were continually engaged in the rougher work of mutual depredation and hostility, the cultivation of knowledge as a separate sphere of exertion, and indeed any semblance of regular investigation even in practical concerns, would be almost unknown, and consequently the virtues and vices connected with the pursuit of truth would not be called forth. Gradually, however, as civilization advanced, as the interests of society growing more complicated required more careful discrimination, as wealth and the exemption

* Astoria, by Washington Irving, vol. ii. p. 79. — 'Horse-stealing is their glory and delight.'

† This is an allusion to the magnanimous conduct of the late Lord Exmouth, on repeated occasions, and more especially in the case of the Dutton. There is something so ennobling in even the mere reading of such instances, which cannot be too widely known, that I have quoted the account in the Appendix, Note A.

from occupation accompanying wealth became diffused, and curiosity was at leisure to speculate on the nature and destiny of man and other beings, to investigate surrounding objects, and to scrutinize passing events, it became manifest that the results of this mental activity would have important bearings on the fortunes of mankind. What we term inquiry must always have place and possess importance in a certain degree, inasmuch as it is mixed up with ordinary conduct; but it is not so immediately apparent that, when pushed beyond the point of direct applicability, it has an extensive influence on human affairs.

The speculations of thoughtful men might naturally be regarded for a while as vain dreams or visionary theories, having little connection with the hard and pressing realities of life; but they were found in process of time to penetrate every where, to permeate morals, manners, education, government, religion: and when investigation was successfully turned into the paths of physical science, the relation of systematic knowledge to human welfare was brought home to mankind in its most irresistible form.

The happiness of the world has thus proved itself to be in various ways deeply implicated in the establishment of truth and the rectification of error even in subjects apparently remote from ordinary life; and in consequence the conduct both of communities and individuals in every thing relating to inquiry has risen to an importance of which earlier ages never dreamed, and has become more extensively the object of our moral sentiments.

In the second place, concurrently with this change produced by the growing importance of the pursuit of truth, and of all conduct connected with it, the moral sentiments of mankind on the subject have also undergone progressive alteration from a more and more accurate appre-

ciation of the tendencies of human actions, and a nicer discrimination of complicated moral phenomena. On this point, nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that we have greater reason to look forward with hope than around us with complacency, or backward with exultation.

In a matter so greatly enhanced in importance it was hardly to be expected that the good and evil qualities of conduct should be all at once appreciated with distinctness and precision; and, accordingly, a very cursory examination is sufficient to show that mankind have hitherto lamentably erred, and still continue to err, in apportioning their approbation and disapprobation to the qualities displayed in reference to the prosecution of inquiry. Their moral sentiments have been roused indeed, but have at the same time been grossly misdirected. They have too frequently bestowed their smiles on conduct destitute of merit or even fundamentally vicious, and poured their indignation on acts most truly deserving their admiration and applause. Nor as to this misdirection of their feelings can the major part of the human race, even in what are termed by courtesy civilized communities, be truly said to have radically improved. Such mistakes as these are by no means easily rectified. The morality of the subject, besides having been hitherto neglected and still remaining beset with prejudices, involves some nice distinctions, which cannot fail to be generally overlooked or confounded till they have been clearly exhibited and rendered plain and familiar by repeated expositions.

We must expect that here, as well as in other matters, the moral sentiments of mankind will prove tenacious of their accustomed course — reluctant to take a new direction. When men have once been habituated to look upon any quality or any system of action with approbation or the reverse, they can scarcely divest themselves of the

feeling, even though they discover the object no longer to deserve it; and they are slow in bestowing the same sentiment on conduct by which it has not been familiarly excited. Thus (to take an obvious illustration) the barbarian glare anciently flung over warlike qualities and military achievements still continues to dazzle the world into an admiration of actions manifestly destructive to human happiness. On this subject mankind have yet attained to no sound feeling; their moral sentiments lag behind existing knowledge and established conclusions: and it will require the reiterated efforts of moralists and philosophers to work into their minds the only sentiments to be entertained by rational beings towards the vulgar heroes and pageants of history.

The same process of distinctly pointing out and repeatedly exhibiting the clear tendencies of action, is required to rectify the moral feelings of the world in all that regards the pursuit of truth; and we may venture to hope it will be applied with eventual, although not immediate success. Tardy as mankind evince themselves in all changes of moral sentiment, they cannot permanently continue to bestow their approbation on qualities clearly proved to be pernicious, nor withhold it from actions shown to be undeniably calculated for their welfare.

A retrospect of the three last centuries alone leads us to anticipate that any improvement in the discrimination of good and evil in the various paths of human life must eventually find its way from the meditative few to the less reflecting many. Amongst these few, in the present day, the fundamental principles, without which a code of morality in reference to the pursuit of truth cannot exist, are universally held. Philosophers unite in regarding truth as inseparably allied with human happiness, and error as essentially hostile to it. It was otherwise with the sages

of antiquity, amongst whom there was a prevalent dissociation of the utility from the truth of a doctrine. It was supposed that a dogma might be advantageous and even necessary to society, to morality, and to political institutions, although it were false, and that it ought in this case to be strenuously supported and shielded from scrutiny even by those who were aware of its character. With such a notion there could not co-exist any conscious obligation, or any inducement but sheer curiosity, to enter upon the search after truth, and faithfully pursue it. On the contrary, it unavoidably led to the employment of fallacious arguments, hollow pretexts, disingenuous connivance, and violent oppression, in order to maintain the authority of established doctrines. It could not fail to be fruitful in falsehood, hypocrisy, fraud, and despotic intolerance.* The same policy of a double doctrine was inculcated by Machiavel, and was, indeed, long acted upon in Europe prior to the reformation; it has been well characterized by Mr. Stewart as the policy of 'enlightening the few and hoodwinking the many.'

If similar views are yet occasionally entertained amongst the ignorant or half-informed, they are seldom avowed. Even the hardly less revolting, but certainly less consistent, principle of more recent times, and maintained even

* 'It seems,' says Dr. Whately, in an instructive dissertation on this subject, 'to have been the settled conviction of most of those who had the sincerest desire of attaining truth themselves, that to the mass of mankind truth was in many points inexpedient, and unfit to be communicated; that, however desirable it might be for the leading personages in the world to be instructed in the true nature of things, there were many popular delusions which were essential to the well-being of society.'—*Essays on the Writings of St. Paul*, p. 3.

by many of the early teachers of the Christian Church,* that a true doctrine may be rightly supported by false representations, and by what are called pious frauds, is discarded professedly, if not always really, by every party, every sect, and every individual with the slightest pretensions to a name in philosophy or literature, or even to a reputable standing in society. 'Nothing,' it has been well remarked, 'can be more irrational in the pretended children of light than to enlist themselves under the banners of Truth, and yet rest their hopes on an alliance with Delusion.' †

There is, happily, a growing disposition in the world, amongst the intelligent part of it at least, to prize truth of doctrine and veracity of statement; to look with disdain on all artifice, disingenuity, and disguise, both in speculation and practice; to regard the business of life no longer as an affair which demands unremitted intrigue and perpetual deceit; to consider the great interests of humanity as not requiring to be supported by ignorance, hypocrisy, and superstition; to believe that the suppression and concealment of facts and arguments can be of no service except to the few at the expense of the many; and that it is for the benefit of mankind, as well as essential to their progress in all which is virtuous and high-minded, that every important question should be freely and boldly examined.‡ This state of feeling, on the part of men of

* Ibid. Also Middleton's Free Inquiry, *passim*.

† Coleridge's Friend, vol. i. p. 53.

‡ 'From the whole deduction which has now been made,' says an able writer, 'it appears that superstition is useless; that truth and reason are alone to be depended on in giving a regular and safe determination to human actions; and that the idea of managing mankind by means of prejudices and by arts of deception is false philosophy, as unwise as it is immoral.' — Dr. HARDY *on the Pro-*

cultivated minds, seems highly favorable to an impartial discussion of the conduct which we ought to observe, or, in other words, the moral sentiments we ought to cherish, in relation to the pursuit of truth; and even if the present endeavor to trace the duties connected with it shall fail of yielding that entire satisfaction which it is seldom the destiny of any thing human to give, it may animate the conscientious inquirer, and serve as a groundwork for more successful efforts.

Little has yet been effected in this part of ethical philosophy; at all events, the subject has never, as far as the author knows, been systematically treated in the point of view here described: it is a department of moral exposition yet to be created. Locke, indeed, in his Conduct of the Understanding, and in his Letters on Toleration, has thrown out excellent remarks on some of the topics which it embraces; and these treatises, which cannot be too warmly recommended, breathe an admirable spirit of right feeling and sound judgment in relation to the pursuit of truth.*

Malebranche, too, in his celebrated work, 'De la Recherche de la Vérité,' abounds with instructive observations, encumbered nevertheless with antiquated matter and

gress of the Christian Religion, quoted in Mill's Translation of Villers on the Reformation, p. 58.

* Since the first edition of the present Essay was published, many works have appeared, in which correct and ennobling sentiments concerning the morality of investigation are incidentally expressed, some of which the author has had the satisfaction of tracing, or fancying he traced, to the influence of his own inadequate exposition of the subject. The Essays and Discourses of the late Dr. Channing may be particularly cited, as abounding in fervent and forcible lessons on this great theme. Occasional use of them is made in the following pages.

exploded doctrines, through which few in the present day will venture to toil.

Neither of these distinguished writers, however, looked at the subject in the particular light in which it is the object of the following pages to place it; and even if they had, the lapse of a century and a half may be presumed to have brought us into a more favorable position for viewing it in its most important relations.

CHAPTER II.

THE DUTY OF ENTERING UPON INQUIRY.

To inquire is simply to endeavor to obtain a knowledge of something we are ignorant of. Inquiries are therefore of all kinds, trivial and important, easy and difficult; they may be directed to the properties of matter or of mind, to the concerns of individuals, or of communities, or of mankind at large, to what at present exists, or to what has formerly happened; they vary, from the casual question regarding events of the day, to the laborious researches of the historian, and to the long series of observations and experiments by which the philosopher interrogates nature.

What people usually have in their minds, however, when speaking in general terms of the pursuit of truth and duty of inquiry, seems to be that sort of investigation which has no direct reference to ordinary exigencies, but goes beyond what the immediate necessities and unimportant occurrences of life require. Few would probably think it needful to discuss the advantages or the obligation of seeking to know whatever is directly requisite for guiding their individual conduct on common occasions.

Systematic, or scientific, or speculative investigation is generally implied when the interesting topics just mentioned are in question, and perhaps there is usually a further implication that the inquiry, whatever it may be, is one that concerns society or mankind.

On coming, nevertheless, to consider the subject closely, it does not appear that any strict line can be drawn between the different kinds of investigation referred to. They pass into each other by insensible degrees, are frequently intermingled, and sometimes interchange characters; nor even, if they could be clearly discriminated, would it be found that the moral obligation to enter upon any researches depends on such distinctions. It is the circumstances in which a man is placed that must determine (chiefly at least) how far it is incumbent on him to engage in any investigation.

That there are duties to be performed in reference to this matter, no one will be hardy enough to deny. If truth is so important to mankind, as we have shown it to be, there can scarcely fail to be circumstances which render it imperative on human beings to strive to attain it, or which in other words bring the pursuit of it under the cognizance of morality. The problem before us is to determine what those circumstances are.

SECTION I.

IN WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES INQUIRY IS A DUTY.

Although it may be universally admitted that there are cases in which it is incumbent on mankind to engage in the pursuit of truth, those cases may appear on a first view too various and complicated to be definitively classified. On further reflection, nevertheless, it will be found that the most important, if not the whole of them, may be comprehended in a few general propositions.

The duty of inquiry will be generally acknowledged to be obligatory upon every one in proportion to his capacity and opportunities in the following circumstances:

1. When any direct means are within his reach of obtaining additional or more accurate knowledge of the relation in which he stands, and the duty which he owes to God.

2. When the extent and accuracy of his knowledge on any subject must have an important and direct effect on his conduct in life, public or private, professional or unofficial, and consequently on the happiness of his fellow-creatures.

3. When he takes upon himself the office of instructing others; a case included, indeed, in the preceding, but of such peculiar distinction from any other, as to deserve a separate consideration.

4. When he possesses opportunities and abilities for prosecuting historical, scientific, or philosophical investigations, so as to enlarge the bounds of human knowledge.

These four cases appear to comprise all the great circumstances which can be considered by any class of moralists, as rendering it the duty of mankind to enter upon any regular and express inquiry; and they are all fruitful of important suggestions, deserving the deep consideration, not only of the moralist and philosopher, but of every human being.

1. Let us advert, in the first place, to the duty of availing ourselves of any direct means within our reach to increase and correct our knowledge of the relations in which we stand, and the duty we owe to the Great Author of the universe. In this are obviously included both the study of his attributes as displayed in the works of nature, and an investigation of the authenticity and import of any alleged communication from him to human beings.

If we admit that there are any moral relations at all between us and the Supreme Being, we cannot but conclude that our ideas of his attributes must be pleasing to

him and beneficial to ourselves, in proportion as they are worthy of their object, or, in other words, in proportion as they are accurate; whence it evidently becomes a general duty to exalt our conceptions of the Deity, by making ourselves acquainted with the real constitution of nature, as well as by correcting and enlarging our views of moral and intellectual excellence. If it were not incumbent upon us on other accounts to neglect no accessible means of acquiring a knowledge of the universe around us, and of our own sensitive and rational nature, this consideration alone would render it obligatory to seize every opportunity of escaping from ignorance and error. The conceptions of an uninstructed, although a virtuous man, or of an individual, however conversant with physical science, who has never investigated his own mental constitution and the true nature of morality, must inevitably be far less worthy of the Great Author of the universe than the human mind is capable of forming; and such unworthy conceptions cannot possibly be raised or rectified in the slightest degree by any other means than the removal of that ignorance to which they owe their imperfections.

The effect, too, of wrong ideas of God on man himself must not be overlooked: it is, in truth, a consideration of the highest moment. 'The Deity,' says an able writer, 'is proposed as the object, not merely of our belief, but of our practical adoration and love — in the imitation, limited and imperfect as it must be, of His moral perfections. Hence the vital practical importance of the most unimpeachable conception of those attributes, and of removing any thing like a limitation on their infinite moral excellence.' *

* The Connection of Natural and Divine Truth, by the Rev. Baden Powell, p. 212.

The pernicious consequences of erroneous and degrading conceptions of the Deity on the moral conduct of mankind, have seldom been sufficiently considered. To every man, the ideas which he forms of God must constitute a model to which he will naturally tend to conform himself, and according to which he will consider himself obliged in many cases to shape his own actions. If, therefore, he represents in his own imagination this Almighty Being as of an arbitrary, malevolent, selfish, and revengeful character (which are too often the actual notions lurking in the minds of the unenlightened, while the attributes of good and just and merciful are on their lips,) he will insensibly and without any compunction become cruel, capricious, and tyrannical in his own social sphere. Or, perhaps, in many cases, it would be more correct to say that he would remain so. For barbarous and ignorant man first forms his notions of the Deity from his own low standard of what an All-powerful Being would do (beyond which, in fact, it is impossible for him to go); and then having consecrated his crude ideas by fixing upon them the imaginary stamp of divinity, he fears to depart from them, and it is with difficulty that he advances to more accurate and enlightened views of moral excellence than are warranted by the model of his own creation.

The slow progress of the race in true morality is to be ascribed in a great measure to these consecrated crudities of former ages. The ideas of mankind, naturally progressive on this as on all other subjects, are continually called back to the venerated model while they have an irresistible tendency to depart from it. To borrow an expressive phrase from a modern writer, 'they are tethered to the stump of old superstitions.' Thus the morality of a nation may long remain rude, vacillating, and incon-

sistent amidst the wonders of mechanical art, the achievements of physical science, and the refinements of taste.

Looking then both at the relation in which mankind stand to God, and at their own social claims and personal interests, it is unquestionably a general duty on their part, according to their means and opportunities, to enlarge and purify their conceptions of the Great Author of Nature, by making themselves acquainted, as accurately and extensively as possible, with his works, and investigating the truths of morality. To observe, to inquire, to examine, to reason, to meditate, — these are the only means which they can employ to elevate their minds on this great subject — the noblest homage which they can render at the throne of the universe.

'Much earnest, patient, laborious thought,' says an eminent writer, 'is required to see this Infinite Being as he is, to rise above the low gross notions of the Divinity, which rush in upon us from our passions, from our selfish partialities, and from the low-minded world around us.' 'Every man's elevation,' observes the same writer, 'is to be measured first, and chiefly by his conception of this Great Being.' *

Not less imperative reasons exist why we should diligently apply ourselves to the examination of the authenticity and import of any alleged communication from God to mankind, that wears the least semblance of credibility. To neglect inquiry under these circumstances, would not only be a breach of the manifest duty arising out of the relation of a creature to his Creator, but it would be to plunge ourselves into those evils which an unacquaintance with accessible knowledge, and, much more, any positive

* Lecture on the Elevation of the Laboring Classes, by Dr. Channing.

errors on so momentous a subject, would be sure to bring, as well as to sacrifice all those benefits which would necessarily flow from the possession of the truth. The disastrous consequences which have arisen to mankind from mistakes on this great question, are alone sufficient to teach us the imperative obligation of entering upon the inquiry — an obligation under which every human being lies according to his means and opportunities, not (let it be borne in mind) to his fellow-creatures, but to that Omniscient Being who is alone competent to judge how far it has in any instance been fulfilled.

Surely, if there is any one course of conduct more than another which common sense and conscience unite in pointing out as imperative upon us, it is to devote ourselves to an investigation of the genuineness and the meaning of a communication, asserting itself with any shadow of plausibility to be a message from the great Author of Nature.* In what way such an investigation, in common with all others, ought to be prosecuted, will be shown in a subsequent part of this Essay.

2. It will be readily admitted that it is likewise imperative on every one to undergo the labor of inquiry according to his means and opportunities in regard to all subjects which have an important and direct bearing on his social conduct; which, in other words, furnish grounds for determining what that conduct shall be. Not to inquire in these cases, would be to take steps involving the happiness of our fellow-creatures, as well as of ourselves, without

* For a more adequate exposition of this part of the subject, on which it would be here out of place to do more than briefly touch, the reader may consult 'Letters of an Egyptian Kafir in search of a Religion,' to which the present revised Essay must acknowledge considerable obligations; and which will be quoted on several occasions in the sequel.

knowing or doing all in our power to learn the consequences of those steps: it would be staking, in fact, the welfare of others and our own on the mere chance of being ignorantly in the right. How extensive and momentous this branch of duty is, will appear to any one who reflects that reputation, fortune, morals, health, life, are daily committed to the statesman, the judge, the lawyer, the physician, and the navigator, and must be placed in jeopardy, not only by their neglecting to investigate each particular case as it arises, but by professional error or ignorance, which proper inquiry would have removed. Nor is it a less powerful consideration that the destiny of a family, as well as of a community, is dependent on the due prosecution of inquiries connected with its welfare, and especially that the physical and moral being of a child may be irremediably depraved for want of knowledge accessible but neglected by the parent.

But there is a more general duty than any of these, which comes under this head — the important duty too little adverted to, if not wholly overlooked, of investigating the accuracy of our moral sentiments and the justness of our application of them. Obliged every day to mingle in the conflicting pursuits and interests of mankind, where there is constant opportunity for the exercise of every virtue and vice incident to human nature — called also to pronounce sentence upon others, to shape our behavior to them accordingly, and thus to affect their happiness by our words and deeds, it behoves us to make ourselves well acquainted with the real tendencies of human actions, to ascertain with the utmost accuracy what is really worthy of approval or censure, as well as to satisfy ourselves that the action which we praise or condemn comes under the class to which we refer it.

It is painful to see how grossly this maxim is contra-

vened — to witness the negligence of the greater part of mankind in regard to a just appreciation of social duties — to mark the arrogant spirit in which moral verdicts are flung about at random, when it is manifest that the self-constituted judges have never investigated the grounds on which such verdicts are pronounced, never taken the trouble to inquire whether the actions which they applaud or stigmatise are really beneficial or injurious to the happiness of mankind, or even whether there is evidence that they have been actually committed.

We shall have, hereafter, to bring into view the bitter consequences of such negligence of inquiry, and especially of such rash and ignorant judgments in relation to human conduct in the very subject of our present speculations, namely, the pursuit of truth.

Meanwhile it is sufficiently evident from what has been said, how extensive must be the influence of the accurate or inaccurate direction of moral sentiment both on a man's own conduct, and on his application of the powerful instruments of approbation and censure to the conduct of his neighbors; and how strong, therefore, is the obligation resting upon every individual, in proportion to his opportunities, to acquire the knowledge necessary for the correct discrimination of moral good and evil.

In reference to the general duty of entering upon the task of investigation, as here inculcated, a modern writer makes the following judicious remarks:

'It is much to be feared,' he says, 'that the opinions of men in general on subjects of the greatest importance, and on which it most depends whether their influence shall be beneficial or injurious to mankind, are formed without inquiry or consideration, and are the mere prejudices of education; or the effects of caprice; or adopted because they will promote their interest; or because they

are in fashion, and propagated by those who have a direct interest in deceiving the world. Very few even think of examining into the truth of the opinions which they find to prevail in the more respectable classes of society; but most men adopt them as sound maxims, and regulate by them their judgment and actions, even in cases in which they must necessarily incur a very heavy responsibility. Yet while they thus take no pains to avoid error, they are always ready, when it turns out that they are in the wrong, to plead their ignorance or error in excuse for their misconduct; though it be manifest that neither ignorance nor error is a valid excuse, where it might have been prevented or remedied by such an attention to the subject, as its importance, honestly considered, would have appeared to require, and by the use of the means which were in their power.' *

'The improvement of our judgment,' says another writer, 'and the increase of our knowledge, *on all subjects included within our sphere of action*, are not merely advantages recommended by prudence, but absolute duties imposed on us by conscience.' †

Of the lamentable effects of neglecting almost all the duties specified under this head, a striking illustration is furnished by an incident which occurred within the memory of many now living. A young woman, Eliza Fenning, was capitally condemned for the alleged crime of attempting to poison part of her master's family, on evidence of the most inconclusive character, and after a hasty and insufficient trial. Subsequently to her conviction, fresh evidence in her favor, calculated to make any wise and

* Introduction to the Study of Moral Evidence, by the Rev. J. E. Gambier, 3d ed. p. 132.

† Coleridge's Friend, vol ii. p. 171.

good man pause and review his conclusions, even on a less awful occasion, was tendered to the judge; the discrepancies in the testimony of the witnesses on the trial were pointed out by the poor girl herself, not only to that functionary, but to the Lord Chancellor and to the Secretary of State; and other efforts were used to avert the terrible calamity of putting the innocent to death: but all without avail. She perished on the scaffold.

Here the judge had, in the first place, manifestly neglected the duty imperative on all judges, of making themselves acquainted with the obligations imposed upon them by their office and with the principles of evidence, and was therefore professionally unfit for his situation; he showed himself ignorant of the simple principle, that it was his duty to protect the accused from a capital conviction, except on the most unquestionable proof; he seems not even to have attained to the conception of what constitutes a fair trial. During the proceedings he was deaf to the repeated entreaties of the poor victim in his power that a particular witness should be examined; and after this mockery of justice was over, he pertinaciously refused to hear further material evidence which the diligence of some benevolent individuals had collected and offered to his notice.* Thus his professional ignorance, and his obstinacy in rejecting information, were the means of bringing to an ignominious end a young woman, innocent (as far as human sagacity can discover†) of the crime laid to her charge, and notwithstanding her lowly condition, of fine

* Sir Samuel Romilly, in speaking of this unhappy case, stigmatises the conduct of the Recorder as savage. — *Memoirs*, vol. iii. p. 235.

† It has been stated in the public papers, that a death-bed confession by the actual perpetrator of the crime has completely vindicated the innocence of this noble but unfortunate girl.

moral and intellectual qualities. Her youth, her interesting personal appearance, her reliance on her own innocence, and on the force of truth for an acquittal, the noble spirit with which she supported the unexpected verdict, and struggled in the dreary desolation of a convict's cell against the unjust sentence, and, finally, the feminine propriety and more than feminine firmness of her demeanor throughout the closing scene, altogether form a picture deeply affecting. The story of Eliza Fenning makes the heart bleed. It is not often that the consequences of neglecting the duty of inquiry, both special and general, are condensed into such intense evil, and can be so plainly exhibited.

3. Many words will not be required to prove that he who takes upon himself the office of instructing others, should previously investigate the subjects he has to explain. Inquiry is the only means in his power of satisfying himself that he is disseminating truth and not falsehood. Nothing can be conceived more absolutely imperative. No obligation can be stronger than that of a teacher to render himself competent to the function of teaching, so that he shall not delude or mislead his disciples. Instruction can have no legitimate object but to teach what is true; and it is a sort of practical contradiction to engage in the office without having bestowed the trouble of ascertaining what the truth is. To mention the schoolmaster, the clergyman, the lecturer, the public speaker, the author, the critic, is sufficient to show how numerous and influential are the classes bound by this obligation, and the important character of the duty resting upon them. The morality of this portion of the subject is so plain, that it would almost seem a waste of words to elucidate or enforce it, and yet, if we look into actual life, we shall discover few symptoms of an adequate conception of the duty in question.

Subjects requiring disciplined minds, years of study, careful weighing of evidence and nice discrimination, are taught with unhesitating confidence, and not seldom with dogmatical arrogance by men without any qualification for the office, and without even the pretext of a due course of inquiry, as if they labored under an utter insensibility to the obligations incurred by assuming so important a function. It is, indeed, a lamentable proof of the low state of moral intelligence amongst us, that human beings should rashly engage without preparation in the office of instructing their fellow-creatures upon matters of the highest concern, and not only be perfectly unconscious that they are trespassing against any moral rule, but have an impression that they are performing a valuable service.

It is needless to dwell on the perpetuation of ignorance and error, which must ensue from the neglect of full and sedulous inquiry on the part of a teacher into whatever subject he engages to explain. If every one who takes upon himself this function would faithfully examine his own deficiencies, and exert himself to supply them, or abandon it to others more adequately qualified, it would be impossible that the enlightened views of the preëminent of the race should make their way in the world with so much difficulty as they do, and diffuse their benefits in so small a circle as that to which we see them confined.

The duty of every one in the circumstances described under the three preceding heads, is not only to enter upon investigation, but to pursue his inquiries as far as his capacity and opportunities permit, till he has come to satisfactory conclusions, or feels thoroughly convinced that he has obtained all the light which investigation can supply. It is especially incumbent on men of cultivated minds who understand the process of reasoning and the force of evidence, not to be contented with their opinion

on any question of importance till they can trace its connection with indisputable facts or with self-evident principles. The same considerations which render it a duty to commence inquiry, render it a duty to persevere till this satisfactory end has been achieved.

4. We are next to consider the duty of entering upon scientific or philosophical or other systematic investigation with the simple view of enlarging human knowledge, and when investigation is not incumbent upon us from the considerations already specified.

A great majority of mankind struggling for existence, and worn down with labor and anxiety, may obviously in this question be at once set aside: they are exonerated by their position from devoting attention to the investigation of any problems but such as directly relate to their actual condition, or are forced upon their notice. Doomed to incessant toil or unremitting care, they are rather to be commended when they evince any eagerness for extraneous knowledge, than blamed for indifference to every subject not immediately bearing on their moral and physical well-being.

Upon those who are elevated above this constant attention to the exigencies of ordinary life, the duty of inquiry for the single purpose of adding to the stock of human knowledge presses with varying force according to their station and abilities. Perhaps we can attain to no more precise rule on the subject, than that every one who has powers and opportunities to extend the boundaries of knowledge by systematic research is under a proportionate moral obligation to do so.

There is another consideration which still further abates the precision of the rule. It is obvious that no man, even the ablest and most accomplished, can be expected to pursue every inquiry which his powers may be calcula-

ted to solve, or his position may enable him to enter upon.

We are in the present day surrounded on all sides by phenomena pressing on our curiosity. Nature, to the awakened minds of men of the nineteenth century, presents herself as a very different object of investigation from what she appeared a few hundred years ago, and science and history offer their accumulated instruments and volumes to assist us in the interpretation of her laws. Facts and principles, problems for solution, and fields of inquiry have multiplied on our hands. A single mind is no longer capable of grasping all extant knowledge; and the ablest of us must be content with comprehending a part, and casting a longing look at the rest.

The inquiries of every human being are thus necessarily limited by the multiplicity of objects presenting themselves for investigation. Different individuals, from peculiar inclinations or capacities, will range over different parts of the field of knowledge. Whether they devote their abilities to this or that subject must be frequently a matter of mere personal taste; and it can be only under some peculiar circumstances that the direction of their scientific inquiries will be a matter of duty.*

That such gifted individuals as have been described are nevertheless bound to enter upon some investigations or other for the extension of science, seems manifest. If we suppose a human being to be blessed with the combined opportunities, attainments, and original genius of a New-

* If it doth not appear,' says a learned writer, 'precisely into what kind of studies this respect to truth will carry a man preferably to all others, how far it will oblige him to continue his pursuit after knowledge, and when the discontinuance begins to be no offence against truth, he must consult his own opportunities and genius, and judge for himself as well as he can.' — WOLLASTON *on the Religion of Nature*, p. 24.

ton, we feel at once that the pursuit of truth is his appropriate career. In such a man indolence and inertness would be a crime.

Here is an individual endowed with pre-eminent capacity, trained in all human learning, gifted with leisure, animated by companions engaged in similar pursuits, stimulated by novel ideas beaming on his intellectual vision, capable of opening to his fellow-creatures new views of nature and vistas of thought, and yet he refuses to bestow any labor in following out these happy glimpses and brilliant conceptions; he is content with the passive enjoyment of seeing them 'come and depart,' without making any effort to follow out and perpetuate his discoveries for the good of mankind. He has great objects within his reach, yet refuses to stretch out his hand.

No one requires to be told that such a being so acting would deserve the condemnation of the wise and the good, while he would be casting away some of the highest enjoyments of which human nature is capable. From such inertness, fortunately, the world is in a great measure secured by the irresistible propensity of genius to exert its powers. The issue is not left to the mere influence of a sense of duty, although the moral obligation does not the less exist, and if clearly apprehended, must constitute a valuable incitement in those moments when the ardor of enterprise is chilled by the cold reception which awaits discovery, or relaxes at the sight of the boundless field that remains to be explored.

SECTION II.

OBJECTIONS AND PREJUDICES INIMICAL TO THE DUTY OF INQUIRY.

It is not easy to imagine how the plain statement of duty presented in the last section can be denied or contro-

verted ; yet it frequently happens in actual life, that from indolence, ignorance, misapprehension, prejudice, or fearfulness, the business of inquiry, if not positively repudiated, is really evaded.

One of the first expedients that naturally suggest themselves to stave off so troublesome a task, is to plead the undefined nature of the duty as rendering it impossible for any one to determine either for himself or for others, how far in any circumstances it is obligatory.

In this plea there is doubtless some force. The circumstances described in the preceding section as imposing the duty of investigation, are various in their character and weight, and it is frequently too much to expect from the parties on whom it is incumbent, that they should be fully conscious of their own want of knowledge, and be able to form clear views of what they ought to do, or of the best manner of doing it. There are in fact two classes of cases which may be readily distinguished. With one class there can be little difficulty. Men must be frequently well aware of their deficiency in such information as their position in the world demands ; and in those cases where the knowledge is estential to action, not only must their culpability in not having prosecuted the necessary investigations be clear to their own discernment, but it will often be unequivocally manifest to others. On the other hand, when we quit the sphere of action for that of speculation, when we turn for instance to such subjects as the character and proceedings of the Deity, the truth of historical records, or the correctness of our moral sentiments, or to any branch of science which we may be capable of exploring, the task of satisfying ourselves as to what investigations it is requisite to undertake, is by no means so determinate. In such cases every individual must be necessarily left to his own conscience : the decision,

whether he has acted up to the demands of the occasion, does not belong to his fellow-creatures, nor can they in general be competent to pronounce sentence. The explanation of the duty insisted upon in the preceding section, has constantly implied that to enter upon inquiry can be considered as obligatory only in proportion to the means which are actually within reach, including the degree of intelligence possessed regarding the duty itself, and can be perfectly so only to such individuals as are fully able to comprehend the position in which they stand to God and their own species. How far any one approaches to this distinct apprehension, and acts according to the light of his knowledge in availing himself of the means within his power, are evidently points not within the province of humanity to decide. All that can be done is to delineate the course which ought to be followed, the line of conduct which is right in itself, and which would be pursued by any one who clearly saw the obligation imposed by the circumstances described, and was resolved conscientiously to discharge it.

It may be quite practicable to point out a proper line of action in given circumstances, and at the same time exceedingly difficult to determine how far particular individuals come under those circumstances, and are culpable for not observing the prescribed track.

Nevertheless, it will still remain true (and the consideration is a most important one,) that if we neglect or omit, whether culpably or innocently, to enter upon the proper investigation demanded by any combination of circumstances, we shall miss all the direct advantages of the right course, and incur the unhappy consequences of error; we shall have no part in the conscious satisfaction, the clearness of view and solidity of principle, the worth of character, the power of beneficial action, the ability to

avert or avoid evil arising from diligent and well directed inquiry. These are advantages not to be attained without making the efforts on which they depend. No purity or uprightness of intention can secure us against the bad consequences of not having taken pains to possess ourselves of the truth.

Besides this objection, there are other phantoms conjured up in the path of investigation by the prejudices of some and the fearfulness of others, which the aid of reason may be required to dissipate, as they are frequently made pretexts to justify inaction.

These pretexts for declining the duty of inquiry are generally masked under vague or metaphorical phrases: —'Inquiry implies the weighing of evidence, and might lead to doubt and perplexity;' 'to search into a subject might shake the settled convictions of the understanding;' 'to examine opposite arguments and contradictory opinions might contaminate the mind with false views.'

Every one who alleges such pretexts as these for declining inquiry, must obviously begin by assuming that his own opinions are unerringly in the right. Nothing could justify any man for declining the investigation of a subject which it is his duty to teach, or on which his opinions necessarily determine his religious or his social conduct, but the possession of an understanding free from liability to error. Not gifted with infallibility, in what way except by diligent inquiry can he obtain any assurance that he is not in the one case disseminating erroneous opinions, or in the other pursuing a course of injurious action? If he holds any opinion, he must have acquired it, either by examination, or by instillation, rote, or some process which he cannot recollect. On the supposition that he has acquired it by proper examination, the duty on which we are now insisting has been discharged, and the matter

is at an end. If he has acquired it in the other manner, if it is fast fixed in his understanding without any consciousness on his own part how it came there, the mere plea that his mind might become unsettled, can be no argument against the duty of investigation. For any thing he can allege to the contrary, his present opinions are wrong; and in that case the disturbance of his blind conviction, instead of being an evil, is an essential step towards arriving at the truth.

There is no foreseeing how far the subtlety of interest and indolence may go; and it may be possibly assigned as a further reason for his declining inquiry, that he may come to some fallacy which he cannot surmount, although convinced of its character. If he is convinced of its character, he must either have grounds for that conviction or not. If he has grounds, let him examine them, draw them out, try if they are valid, and then the fallacy will stand exposed. If he has no grounds for suspecting a fallacy, what an irrational conclusion he confesses himself to have arrived at! But perhaps he will reply — he may be unable to solve the difficulty, his mind may become perplexed, and the issue may prove, after all, that it would have been much better had he remained in his former strong, though unenlightened conviction. Why better? If he is in perplexity, let him read, think, consult the learned and the wise, and in the result he will probably reach a definite opinion on one side or the other. But if he should still remain in doubt, where is the harm, or rather why is it not to be considered a good? The subject is evidently one which admits strong probabilities on opposite sides. Doubt, therefore, is the proper sentiment for the occasion: it is the result of the best exercise of the faculties; and either positively to believe, or positively to disbelieve, would imply an erroneous appreciation of evidence.

In the minds of some people, a strong prejudice appears to exist against that state of the understanding which is termed doubt. A little reflection, however, will convince any one, that on certain subjects doubt is as appropriate a state of mind as belief, or disbelief on others. There are doctrines, propositions, facts, supported and opposed by every degree of evidence, and many amongst them by that degree of evidence of which the proper effect is to leave the mind in an equipoise between two conclusions. In these cases, either to believe or disbelieve would imply that the understanding was improperly affected. Doubt is the appropriate result, which there can be no reason to shrink from or lament.*

But it is further urged, that inquiry might contaminate the mind with false views; and therefore it is wise and laudable to abstain from it.

We can understand what is meant by contaminating a man's habits, or disposition, or even imagination. If a man read impure books, or works of extravagant fiction and false taste, his imagination will inevitably be colored by the ideas presented, and the conceptions which subsequently rise up in his mind will partake of the impurity and extravagance thus made familiar to it. But there is no analogy on this point between the understanding and the imagination. There is contamination, there is evil, in preposterous and obscene images crowding before the intellectual vision, notwithstanding a full and distinct per-

* 'One who has an aversion to doubt, and is anxious to make up his mind and to come to *some* conclusion on every question that is discussed, must be content to rest many of his opinions on very slight grounds, since no one individual is competent to investigate fully all disputable points. Such a one, therefore, is no lover of truth; nor is in the right way to attain it on any point.' — Archbishop Whately *on the Writings of St. Paul*, p. 25.

ception of their character; but there is no contamination, no evil in a thousand false arguments coming before the mind, if their quality is clearly discerned. The only possible evil in this case is mistaking false for true; but the man who shrinks from investigation, lest he should mistake false for true, can have no reason for supposing himself free from that delusion in his actual opinions. To maintain that he would be more likely to escape from error without investigation than with it, is a species of absurdity which requires no exposure.*

On no plea, therefore, can investigation, in the circumstances already stated, be declined. That it should unsettle a man's established convictions, or that it should lead to ultimate doubt, may be a good: the one is the necessary preliminary to passing from error to truth; the other, if ultimately produced, is most likely to be the proper state of his intellect in relation to the particular subject examined. That inquiry should contaminate his mind is also a vain allegation. The only meaning which can be attached to the phrase, implies a misconception of falsehood for truth — a delusion which inquiry is not only the direct means of preventing, but of dissipating if he is already involved in it.

Whoever fears to examine the foundation of his opinions, and enter on the consideration of any train of counter-argument, may rest assured, that he has some latent apprehension of their unsoundness and incapacity of standing investigation. And as a fear of this sort, while it is totally discordant with that spirit of candor and fairness which every one must acknowledge to be the proper disposition for the attainment of truth, is at variance with the positive duty of the occasion, no man

* The way not to be led into error (remarks Hooker) is to be thoroughly instructed. — *Ecclesiastical Polity*, book iii.

should suffer it to prevent him from boldly engaging in the requisite inquiry. A great deal of invective has been levelled at free-thinking. Taking the expression literally as applying to the process of thought, the only distinction worth attending to on this point is that between accurate and inaccurate, true and false. Thinking can never be too free, provided it is just. But construing the phrase as synonymous with free inquiry, it follows from the clearest principles of morality, that the freest inquiry not only is an innocent act, but under certain circumstances becomes an imperative duty.

SECTION III.

CONTINUATION OF THE SUBJECT.

Besides the objections to inquiry examined in the last section, there are some other prejudices of a similar character, which, as long as they prevail, must form serious impediments to the attainment of truth.

One of these is a fear that we may search too far, and become chargeable with presumption in prying into things we ought not to know: another prejudice is, that we may contract guilt should we arrive at erroneous conclusions, or conclusions at variance with such as are established; and another, that it is a sort of praiseworthy humility to acquiesce in received opinions, on the authority of others, and refrain from thinking for ourselves.

A brief space will not be ill bestowed in setting these prejudices in their true light.

As to the first a few words will suffice to prove that nothing can be more irrational and unfounded. It has been shown in another place * that truth is conducive to

* Essay on the Publication of Opinions, and also the Introductory Chapter to the present Essay.

human happiness; the attainment of it, one of the highest objects of human enterprise; and the free exercise of our faculties on all subjects, the means of securing this invaluable blessing.* If this is a correct representation, the prosecution of inquiry in any possible direction is a process from which there is everything to hope and nothing to fear, and to which there is no limits but such as the nature of our own faculties prescribes.

It is not easy to conceive with exactness what can possibly be apprehended from investigation; what is the precise danger or difficulty it is expected to involve us in; what is implied in the fear that we may search too far; what are those things which it may be presumptuous to ascertain. Such persons as have imagined that inquiry might conduct us to forbidden truths in the fields of knowledge, seem to have had no determinate notions as to the sort of discoveries we should make, but have been influenced by some loose analogy with human affairs.

As there are secret transactions in society, amongst bodies or individuals, which we should be culpable in prying into; sealed documents circulating in the world, sacred to those whose names they bear, and not to be scrutinized with honor by any of the intermediate agents through whose hands they pass; records of private affairs, kept solely for the use of the parties concerned in them, and which we are not to come upon by stealth, and rifle of their information; and as to infringe the privacy of these matters would be stigmatised as indelicate, meddling, presumptuous, so it seems to be supposed that there are closed documents in nature into which we are forbidden to

* 'When I see,' said Sir George Savile, in a speech seventy years ago, 'when I see a rivulet flow to the top of a high rock, and requiring a strong engine to force it back again, then shall I think that freedom of inquiry will be prejudicial to truth.'

look, private processes going on into which we have no right to intrude, truths existing which are not to be profaned by our scrutiny, and to attempt to make ourselves acquainted with these is unjustifiable audacity and presumption. If this prejudice does not often assume the definite form here ascribed to it, it may frequently be found exerting an influence without a distinct consciousness in the mind over which it prevails.*

* When the writer penned this passage some twenty years ago, he little thought of the future re-appearance of the prejudice amongst men of education, even in a more palpable form. A clergyman has in a recent publication denounced geological investigations as not '*subjects of lawful inquiry*,' '*shrouded from us by a higher power*,' to be reckoned '*a dark art dangerous and disreputable*.' This statement (for I have not seen the book) is given on the authority of Dr. Pye Smith, in his able and valuable work, '*On the Relation between the Holy Scriptures and some Parts of Geological Science*,' p. 193. The cry of danger, it appears, is not confined to interrogating nature, but extends even to researches into historical documents. 'Scarcely,' says Dr. Wiseman, speaking of the discovery of the key to the hieroglyphical proper names, 'scarcely was it announced to Europe, when timid minds took the alarm and reprobated it as tending to lead men to *dangerous investigations*.'— *Lectures on the Connection between Science and Revealed Religion*, vol ii. p. 76. How strikingly contrasted with the bigotry here noticed is the noble declaration of the present Archbishop of Dublin : — 'As we must not dare to withhold or disguise revealed *religious* truth, so we must dread the progress of no other truth. We must not imitate the bigotted Papists who imprisoned Galileo ; and step forward, Bible in hand (like the profane Israelites carrying the ark of God into the field of battle), to check the inquiries of the geologist, the astronomer, or the political economist, from an apprehension that the cause of religion can be endangered by them. Any theory, on whatever subject that is really sound, can never be inimical to a religion founded on truth ; and any that is unsound may be refuted by arguments drawn from observation and experiment, without calling in the aid of revelation.'— *Essays on St. Paul*, p. 36.

A more striking instance of a completely false analogy could not be adduced. There is not a single point of resemblance throughout the whole field of knowledge to these little secrets, the offspring of human weakness, or the indispensable resources of human imperfection. There is no secret in the natural or the moral world, sacred from the investigation of man. Here there can be no presumption, no undue boldness, no counterpart at all to the audaciousness of one person intruding upon the privacy of another. All that man has to guard against, and that simply for his own sake, is error; his vigilance is required only to insure that his facts are properly ascertained, and his inferences correctly deduced. The presumption he has to repress, is not any presumption in relation to other beings in possession of secrets, which he is trying clandestinely to wrest from them, but merely the presumption of drawing positive and ample conclusions from doubtful and slender premises, of supposing that he has discovered what he has not, that he has succeeded where he has only failed, that he has done what still remains to be accomplished; in a word, the presumption of overrating his own achievements. Here indeed a man may err in self-confidence, but an evil cannot obviously arise from searching too far, which is best remedied by searching farther, by closer reasoning and more rigorous investigation.

The strangest absurdities indeed would be involved in the supposition that we could possibly reach to knowledge, which we ought not to attain. We are placed in this world by the Creator of the universe, surrounded with certain objects and endowed with certain faculties. From these objects, with these faculties, it is implied by the hypothesis under consideration, we may extort secrets which he never designed to be known, extract information which Omnipotence wished to withhold.

The second of the prejudices above enumerated, that we may contract guilt if in the course of our researches we miss the right conclusion, and had therefore better let inquiry alone, is still more prevalent and influential in preventing those investigations which it is our duty to make. On a former occasion * it has been shown, that nothing can be more at variance with reason, than an apprehension of this nature. As our opinions on any subject are not voluntary acts but involuntary effects, in whatever conclusions our researches terminate, they can involve us in no culpability. All that we have to take care of, as will be more largely shown hereafter, is to bestow on every subject an adequate and impartial attention. Having done this we have discharged our duty, and it would be irrational and unmanly to entertain any apprehension for the result.

In fact, there is the grossest inconsistency in the prejudice now under consideration. If we may contract guilt by searching after truth, we may equally do it by remaining in our present state. The reason alleged in the prejudice itself, and the only reason which can be assigned with any plausibility why we may commit an offence by embarking in any inquiry, is that we may by so doing miss the right conclusion, or in other words, fall into error; for no one would seriously contend that we could incur any moral culpability by an investigation which conducted us to the truth. But it is obvious that we may equally miss the right conclusion by remaining in our actual opinions. It is then incumbent on us to ascertain whether we are committing an offence by remaining in them. In other words, it is necessary to examine whether those opinions are true. Thus the reason assigned for not

* Essay on the Formation of Opinions.

inquiring, leads to the conclusion that it is necessary to inquire.

Let those, then, who fear lest investigation should lead them astray, reflect that they have no security from deception in their present state; and that if mere error could be a ground of offence, remaining in error, through supineness or needless apprehension, must be a much heavier transgression than falling into error by the discharge of their duty in diligent and faithful inquiry.

A man, indeed, after the best and most dispassionate investigation of an important subject, may naturally feel a degree of anxiety lest he should, after all, have missed the truth; but in this anxiety there is not or ought not to be, the slightest admixture of moral uneasiness. It is an anxiety, lest his conclusions, when they come to form the grounds of his actions or of his instructions to others, should lead to consequences which he did not anticipate. His conclusions may be wrong, and the consequences disastrous; but if he has a proper view of the matter, he will feel none of the stings of remorse, not the faintest accusation of conscience. Having inquired to the best of his power, he has done all that depended on himself, and would exhibit little wisdom were he to torment himself with reproaches for an unfortunate issue.

The third prejudice we have to consider is, that acquiescence in received opinions, or forbearing (according to the common phrase) to think for ourselves, evinces a degree of humility highly proper and commendable.

If we examine the matter closely, nevertheless, we shall find that it usually evinces nothing but a great degree of indolent presumption or intellectual cowardice. There is often, in truth, as great a measure of presumption in this species of acquiescence as in the boldest hypothesis which the human invention can start. That received or estab-

lished opinions are true, is one of those sweeping conclusions, which would require very strong reasons and often elaborate research to justify it. On what grounds are they considered to be true by one who declines investigation? Because (on the most favorable supposition) they have been handed down to us by our predecessors, and have been held with unhesitating faith by a multitude of illustrious men. But what comprehensive reasons are these? What investigation it would require to show they were valid! As the whole history of mankind teems with instances of the transmission of the grossest errors from one generation to another, and of their having been countenanced by the concurrence of the most eminent of the race; what a large acquaintance with the peculiarities of the generations preceding us, and with the circumstances of the great men to whom we appeal, it would require to show that this particular instance was an exemption from the general lot!

It is then no humility to refrain from inquiry, on the contrary, it is the proper kind of humility (or if it is not humility, it is the proper feeling for the occasion) to be determined to do all in our power to make ourselves acquainted with every subject on which it is necessary for us to pronounce, or profess, or act upon an opinion.

From the necessity of using our own judgment, or, in other words, of forming a conclusion for ourselves, we cannot be absolved. We must form our opinions either of the doctrine itself, or of the comparative degrees of confidence to which those men who have studied the subject are entitled; and it is evident that in the case of disputed doctrines, the latter may be as difficult, and demand as much investigation, as much knowledge and acuteness of judgment, as to come to a decision on the original question.

Let no one, then, deceive himself by supposing that he is exercising the virtue of humility, or modesty, or diffidence, when he is in fact resting in a conclusion, which to reach legitimately would require so much knowledge and ability. Nor let any one suppose that such a plea will exonerate him, in certain circumstances, from the imperative duty of entering upon a rigorous examination of all the evidence within his reach. Far from being a virtue, this kind of acquiescence is in most cases a positive vice, tending to stop all advancement in knowledge and all improvement in practice.

From the preceding review it appears that all these prejudices are equally unfounded; that there are no forbidden truths, to which inquiry may conduct us, no secret fields of knowledge on which we can possibly trespass; that the result of inquiry, whatever it may be, can involve us in no criminality; and, lastly, that it is no true humility to refrain from investigation in deference to the authority of others.

Let the inquirer, then, enter on his task with full confidence that he is embarking in no criminal, or forbidden, or presumptuous enterprise, but is, on the contrary, engaging in the discharge of a duty. Let him be as circumspect as he pleases in collecting his facts and deducing his conclusions, cautious in the process, but fearless in the result. Let him be fully aware of his liability to error, of the thousand sources of illusion, of the limited powers of the individual, of the paramount importance of truth; but let him dismiss all conscientious apprehensions of the issue of an investigation, conducted with due application of mind and rectitude of purpose.

As there are some prejudices which are hostile to inquiry, so there are some principles of an opposite character, the full and adequate conviction of which essentially conduces

to promote it. Amongst these is the truth that knowledge is progressive, and that in this progress every age is placed in a more advantageous position for the comprehension of any subject of science than the last. Every inquirer, therefore, finds himself on higher ground than his predecessors; he can avail himself of their latest acquisitions without the labor of original discovery, and thus, with unbroken spirits and unsubdued vigor, he can commence his career at the ultimate boundary of theirs. Hence, without any presumption in the superiority of his faculties, he may hope to attain views more comprehensive and correct, than were enjoyed by men who immeasurably transcended him in capacity.* All the advantage, nevertheless, which he has over his precursors, his successors will have over him. All his exertions will tend to place them above him; and the very truths which he discovers, should he be fortunate enough to discover any, will give them the power of detecting the errors with which all truths on their first manifestation in any mind are inevitably conjoined.

In such considerations as these there might be something to deter a man of narrow views and selfish feelings. That his opinions should be thus scrutinized and examined, and their imperfections detected; that in process of time he should lose his rank as an oracle on the subject of his exertions, and be superseded by after-sages, might

* 'We can adopt at the present day,' remarks Pascal, 'different sentiments and new opinions, without despising the ancients, or treating them with ingratitude, since the elementary knowledge they left us served as steps for our own. We are indebted to them for our superiority; and, standing on an elevation to which they have conducted us, the least effort raises us still higher; and with less toil and less glory too, we find ourselves above them.'— *Thoughts*, chap. xxvi.

have any other effect than that of stimulating him to exertion. To a man of real genius, however, a man of large and liberal understanding, and as large and liberal feelings, these considerations are at once replete with satisfaction and encouragement, and destructive of undue self-importance and complacency.

When he looks back on his predecessors, he appreciates the advantages of his position, and can thus, without undue self-estimation, indulge a fair hope that by strenuous exertions his own works may form one of the steps in the intellectual progress of the race, and constitute him the author of benefits to be indefinitely perpetuated. When he looks forward, while he exults in the coming glories of progressive knowledge, and anticipates with delight the development of truths which he is never to know, he feels a perfect confidence that any real service which he may render to literature or science will be duly appreciated, and rejoices that any errors into which he may unconsciously wander will do little injury, because they will be speedily corrected.

Knowing that were he even the Newton of his age, he must be eventually outstripped, he considers such an incident as nowise derogatory to his talents or reputation: agitated by none of the jealousy which is too common a disgrace to men who ought to rise superior to the weakness of such a passion, he even feels a desire that he may be outstripped in his own lifetime, a curiosity to know by what modifications his own doctrines will be corrected: he is on the watch for new discoveries, because he knows that there are minds which, having mastered preceding knowledge, are in a condition to make them.

It has been frequently stigmatized as presumptuous and overweening vanity in a man of the present day to fancy himself superior to men of past times; but the view of

the subject here exhibited annihilates all such imputations. It takes away all color of disrespect from the closest scrutiny of the efforts of his predecessors. He is conscious that in the most successful controversy, if controversy it may be called, which he may institute with them, the greatest success cannot be considered as any personal superiority on his part over the object of his remarks; he knows that it is the superiority of the station to which his own times have carried him; and thus the profoundest respect is compatible with the freest examination. What does he admire in the great philosophers of past ages? Not surely their errors, perhaps not one of their unqualified opinions; but he admires the reach of thought which, from the then level of knowledge, could touch on truths the full and perfect mastery of which was to be the work of future ages, the slow result of the successive efforts of persevering and vigorous minds.

Such a view of the progressive character of human knowledge as this, would wonderfully facilitate the pursuit of truth. No single principle with which we are acquainted would have so salutary an influence in promoting candor, liberality, openness to conviction, self-knowledge, proper caution, and proper fearlessness.

CHAPTER III.

DUTIES IN THE PROCESS OF INQUIRY.

WHETHER the preceding chapter has succeeded or not in describing the circumstances which render it obligatory upon mankind to undertake the investigation of any subject, it will be allowed by all, that when it is the duty of men to enter upon inquiry, it is also their duty to adopt the best means in their power for bringing it to a successful issue; or, in other words, for arriving at the truth. And even when inquiry is optional and voluntary, no other course can be wisely or consistently pursued.

Now the success of investigation, as far as the inquirer can influence it, depends on two circumstances, the state of mind on which he enters upon the inquiry, and the conduct which he pursues in relation to the evidence accessible to him.

Let us examine what are the duties of the inquirer in reference to each.

SECTION I.

DUTIES OF THE INQUIRER IN RELATION TO THE STATE OF HIS OWN MIND.

No one who has been accustomed to discriminate the phenomena of the world within him can doubt that there are certain states of mind favorable to success in the pursuit of truth, while there are others of an opposite

character. These, it is necessary for our present purpose to investigate, for unless we clearly understand their nature, we can fully comprehend neither how far they are within our control nor to what extent they are matters of duty. These mental conditions may be classed for convenience under the heads of moral and intellectual, the former comprehending our desires and emotions, the latter, our opinions or modes of thinking.

In entering upon any inquiry, it is obvious that we may be possessed with desires and affections relating to the subject, or to the issue of the investigation, and also with preconceived opinions respecting it, both of which may have a material influence on the result. We may feel, for instance, a lively affection for a doctrine, an irrepressible desire to find it confirmed by examination, and a conviction of its truth, not the less strong for having no dependence on any process of reasoning; or, on the other hand, we may proceed to the investigation with an utter indifference to the issue, and without any decided opinion at all on the subject, or even under the emotions of distaste and antipathy.

So varied, indeed, are the combinations of intellect and feeling under the influence of which we may commence any investigation, that they must be consigned to the recollection or imagination of the reader; but amidst all this variety it is not difficult to point out, with sufficient precision, both the moral and the intellectual states most favorable to the attainment of truth.

The most favorable moral condition in which the inquirer can be, is, unquestionably, when he is possessed with a simple and fervent desire to arrive at the truth without any predilection in behalf of any opinion whatever, and without any other disturbing emotion of hope or fear, affection or dislike. 'To be indifferent,' says

Locke, 'which of two opinions is true, is the right temper of mind that preserves it from being imposed on, and disposes it to examine with that indifferency, till it has done its best to find the truth — and this is the only direct and safe way to it. But to be indifferent whether we embrace falsehood or truth is the great road to error.' *

If a man is possessed with a desire to find a given opinion true, or to confirm himself in a doctrine which he already entertains, he will, in all probability, bestow an undue attention on the arguments and evidence in its favor, to the partial or total neglect of opposite considerations; but if he is free from all wishes of this kind, if he has no predilection to gratify, if his desires are directed solely to the attainment of correct views, he will naturally search for information wherever it is likely to present itself; he will be without motive for partiality, and susceptible of the full force of evidence.

However unaccountable it may at first sight appear, it is a fact, that few human beings, in their moral, religious, and political inquiries, are possessed with this simple desire of attaining truth; their strongest wishes are directed to the discovery of new grounds for adhering to opinions already formed; and they are as deaf to arguments on the opposite side, as they are alive to evidence in favor of their own views. The pure wish to arrive at truth is indeed as rare as the integrity which strictly observes the golden rule to act towards others as we would wish others to act towards us.† For this several reasons may be assigned. A principal one is, that men's interests are often indissolubly connected with the preva-

* Conduct of the Understanding, § 12.

† 'The impartial lovers and searchers of truth,' says Locke, 'are a great deal fewer than one could wish or imagine.' — *Letter to Mr. Samuel Bold.* Works, vol. ix. p. 316.

lence of a certain opinion; they are, therefore, naturally anxious to find out every possible ground why this opinion should be held; their personal consequence, too, is often implicated in its support; they are pledged by their rank or office, or previous declarations, to the maintenance of a determinate line of argument, and they feel that it would be a disparagement to their intellectual powers and to their reputation in the world were it proved to be unsound.

Another reason is, that such opinions are sometimes really objects of affection, and things of habit. We are accustomed to regard them as true; we love them as the rallying points of pleasant ideas and cherished feelings, and we are troubled and even pained when they are presented to us in a different light.

In addition to all this, men are glad to find in their opinions some excuse for their practices. They naturally, therefore, wish to meet with a confirmation of those doctrines which are conducive to their self-complacency.

These, and other similar circumstances, create in the mind a desire to find some given opinion true; and, of course, as far as their influence reaches, extinguish all aspirations and efforts to arrive at the truth.

Even when any one entertains a sincere desire to form correct opinions on any subject, the feelings or emotions associated with it in his own mind may interfere to disturb his intellectual views. It is, perhaps, possible to conceive a man possessed with a genuine wish to arrive at the truth, notwithstanding a feeling of affection or complacency for some particular doctrine; and endued with such self-control as not to allow a feeling of that kind to influence his mode of conducting the investigation; but he cannot prevent it from shedding an influence on his thoughts. Strive as he may, all the considerations favor-

able to the doctrine in question will spontaneously rise to his view with more frequency and vividness, and remain longer above the intellectual horizon than those of an opposite character.

The same effect will frequently take place from an apparently contrary cause. A man may feel a dislike for a certain conclusion; he may dread to find it true; and this very sentiment may direct his thoughts upon it so exclusively as to assist in bringing about the conviction which he wishes to shun.*

In both these cases — in that of affection for a doctrine as well as that of dislike — the consequent judgment will probably be wrong, since whatever fixes the whole attention on part of the evidence tends to vitiate the conclusions drawn by the understanding. A signal instance of the power of fear to cause erroneous judgments in this way, occurred in the middle of the last century. It happened that in the year 1750, on the 8th of February, the shock of an earthquake was felt in London. Precisely four weeks afterwards, on the 8th of March, a similar shock occurred. The people became alarmed, and their fears jumped to the conclusion (absurdly enough) that a third shock would take place after the lapse of a similar period. Meanwhile an insane life-guardsman, excited no doubt by the prevalent apprehension, went about predicting that the cities of London and Westminster would be utterly destroyed on the 5th of April. If the matter had not

* Locke thus vividly describes the despotism of passion: —

'Matters that are recommended to our thoughts by any of our passions take possession of our minds with a kind of authority, and will not be kept out or dislodged; but as if the passion that rules were for the time the sheriff of the place, and came with all the posse, the understanding is seized and taken with the object it introduces as if it had a legal right to be alone considered there.' — *Conduct of the Understanding*, § 45.

appealed to their fears, a prediction from such a person would have been ridiculed, as there could be no grounds for ascribing to him any supernatural powers. As it was, a ready credence was yielded to his prophecy. Before the dreaded hour arrived, thousands fled from the apprehended catastrophe into the country. Some passed the night in their carriages, not being able to procure accommodations in the neighboring towns; others betook themselves to the river, and lay all night in boats, while crowds waited for the dawn of the eventful day in the open fields.* The shame and mortification which these parties felt when the day had passed without the expected convulsion proved how egregiously their fears had misled their judgment. Being able now to view, dispassionately, the very same evidence which they had previously had before them, but which they could not perceive, all the absurdity of their anticipations flashed upon their minds.

The influence of strong feelings in circumscribing the intellectual vision is not the least remarkable when they are habitually associated with a subject, so that whenever the subject enters the mind, the feeling accompanies it. Take, for example, the case of awe. If a man is habitually laboring under this affection, in regard to the subject to be examined, or to the issue of the investigation, it is astonishing how limited will be the scope of his thoughts, how few and how monotonous the conceptions to which the subject will give rise. The accompanying downcast

* The affair is thus mentioned by Horace Walpole, in one of his Letters, dated Wednesday, April 4, 1750. 'I return to the earthquake, which I had mistaken; it is to be to-day. This frantic terror prevails so much, that within these three days seven hundred and thirty coaches have been counted passing Hyde Park Corner, with whole parties removing into the country.' — *Letters*, vol. ii. p. 328, ed. 1840.

look fixed on a few inches of the ground is an apt emblem of the narrow range of ideas which attends the feeling.

It may be questioned whether this kind of constraint ever exists in any intensity in a mind which is occupied with a genuine desire after truth; fear of the result of investigation at least can hardly exist there; but if even a fainter tone of the feeling predominate, it will prevent that quickness of conception, comparison, inference, which would otherwise be brought to bear on the inquiry. However this may be, the fact is, that the state of mind in question is generally found attended by a desire to receive confirmation in our habitual opinions. Men are alarmed when, in departments of knowledge over which the solemnity of awe has diffused itself, they alight on any new ground, or, in other words, on any doctrines at variance with received principles; and their wishes are usually pointed to a corroboration of the views already familiar to their contemplation, and which neither startle their timidity nor task their understandings.

From this brief review, it appears that the emotions described produce two effects: they create desires for some result other than the simple attainment of truth; and even when they create no desires of this kind, they suggest ideas which would not have otherwise entered the mind; or what is equally effectual, they prevent ideas from entering which would have otherwise been suggested.

Important as are the favorable and unfavorable states of mind to the inquirer in relation to the pursuit of truth, they are not more so than the intellectual. In any given mind, the intellectual state most favorable for the attainment of truth is obviously freedom from preconceived errors. The pre-occupation of the understanding by erroneous opinions is one of the greatest impediments

which offer themselves in the pursuit of accurate knowledge. The mere pre-occupancy itself is an obstacle scarcely to be overcome; but as the opinions thus lodged are generally the objects of fondness or veneration, the task of removing them becomes almost hopeless. No language can describe with sufficient force the tenacity with which early received notions are retained: they seem to enter into the very essence of the soul, to weave themselves into the tissue of the understanding, till it transcends the power of conception to imagine them erroneous. In those notions especially, which are coeval with our earliest recollections, and the origin of which we cannot trace, we seem incapable of suspecting the slightest error.*

When such notions are combined with that kind of reverential fear which we have already described, there is no degree of absurdity to which they may not rise. A modern writer, in his travels through Mesopotamia, relates that at Orfah (the ancient Ur of the Chaldees), the river and the fish in it are regarded as sacred to Abraham, and the inhabitants firmly believe that if any of the fish were caught, no process of cooking could make any impression on their bodies. Here is a notion which the people might at once put to the test by direct trial; a fact which they have only to stretch out their hands to verify or disprove; yet so thoroughly pre-occupied are their minds by the prejudice instilled in early infancy, and such awe do they

* 'If the minds of men,' says Hobbes, 'were all of white paper, they would all most equally be disposed to acknowledge whatsoever should be in right method, and by right ratiocination delivered to them: but when men have once acquiesced in untrue opinions, and registered them as authentical records in their minds, it is no less impossible to speak intelligibly to such men, than to write legibly upon a paper already scribbled over.' — *Human Nature*, chap. x.

feel in relation to it, that they have not, according to the account, the slightest suspicion of its absurdity, and would think it profane to attempt to submit it to the ordeal of actual experiment. Whether the superstition is really so gross as here represented or not, it hardly surpasses in that respect instances nearer home.

Combining the states which we have attempted to describe, we have a union of qualifications which every lover of knowledge, every inquirer into the facts of history and the laws of nature should aim at attaining; a simple desire to arrive at the truth, a freedom from disturbing passion, and a freedom from preconceived erroneous opinions.

Of these qualifications, the genuine desire for truth may be considered the most valuable, while it is not the least rare. If it is not the mark, it is at least the indispensable attribute of a great mind. United with a large and comprehensive understanding, it places a man amongst the most efficient benefactors of his species. ('The love of truth,' says a writer whom we take a pleasure in quoting, 'a deep thirst for it, a deliberate purpose to seek and hold it fast, may be considered as the very foundation of human culture and dignity.' *)

Were mankind in general possessed with this desire in any great degree of purity and intenseness, many errors might undoubtedly still prevail in the world from the limited powers of the human intellect; but it is easy to see how much the progress of knowledge would be accelerated, and how soon the traces of illiberality and intolerance would be swept from social intercourse and civil institutions.

Men, in fact, are usually in the appropriate condition of mind here described when they enter on the study of phys-

* Dr. Channing on the Elevation of the Laboring Classes.

ical and mathematical science : their sole object is to know all that is to be known, they seldom have any passions connected with the truths before them, and in general they are perfectly aware of their own ignorance.

If the states of mind favorable and unfavorable to the pursuit of truth, of which we have now taken a survey, were the result of volition, if, in other words, we had but to exert our will at any time, in order to produce or to put an end to them, the course of our duty in relation to our own mental condition would be plain and simple. We should then be bound by the clearest obligations of morality to dismiss from our minds all hope and fear, affection and hatred, preconceived opinions and habitual associations, and approach the consideration of the subject with that perfect indifference for the issue of the investigation and that single love of truth which form the most effectual security against error. All this has accordingly been sometimes enjoined on the inquirer by the liberal and the enlightened, who, in their anxiety to promote a good cause, have overlooked for the moment, the nature of their moral and intellectual constitution. They have fallen into the mistake of requiring what cannot be performed.

'If,' says a writer of this class, 'we heartily desire the purchase of truth, we must shake off the prejudices which custom and education have loaded us with.'—'Make it your business, then,' he continues, 'to extirpate all prejudices, to clear your minds of all sorts of prepossessions, to wipe out all tinctures, and thereby to make way for truth to enter into your souls, and to take possession of them.' —'If we would be masters of truth, our best course is to rid our minds for once of all our preconceived opinions, to quit our most beloved representations of things, to destroy our old notices, to cast away our former preju-

dices, and so to prepare our minds for the reception of truth.' *

Such injunctions would be excellent were they practicable. Every one, however, who will take the trouble of reflecting on what passes in his own breast must be sensible from his proper experience how impossible it is to suppress or discard any preconceptions and feelings of this nature by a mere effort of the will. No human being has any such power over his understanding and affections.

'Though I might find numerous precedents,' says a late eminent writer, 'I shall not desire the reader to strip his mind of all prejudices, or to keep all prior systems out of view during his examination of the present. For, in truth, such requests appear to me not much unlike the advice given to hypochondriacal patients in Dr. Buchan's Domestic Medicine; viz. to preserve themselves uniformly tranquil and in good spirits.' †

A man who has been brought up in ardent admiration of certain doctrines, imbued with a strong affection for them, and impressed with a perfect conviction of their

* A Free Discourse concerning Truth and Error, by John Edwards, D. D., pp. 384, 385. Descartes has a passage much to the same effect: — 'Itaque ad serio philosophandum veritatemque omnium rerum cognoscibilium indagandum, primo omnia prejudicia sunt deponenda; sive accuratè est cavendum, ne ullis ex opinionibus olim à nobis receptis fidem habeamus, nisi prius, iis ad novum examen revocatis, veras esse comperiamus.'—*Princ. Phil., Pars Prima*, § lxxv.

Bacon seems to have contemplated the possibility of such a 'deposition' of prejudices in an often-quoted passage: — 'No one has yet been found of so constant and severe a mind, as to have determined and tasked himself utterly to abolish theories and common notions, and to apply his intellect altogether smooth and even, to particulars anew.'

† Coleridge's Biographia Literaria, vol. i. p. 238.

truth, has no power to lay down these feelings at pleasure. They have been the slow result of years, the gradual product of innumerable circumstances, and we might as well ask him to divest himself of the recollections of his youth, as of these affections for what he was taught in it.

It is always injurious, always destructive of happiness, to require or to aim at more in the code of morality than can be possibly accomplished, more than depends on a man's self; and it therefore becomes necessary to ascertain, what, in this respect, is really practicable. Although an individual cannot at pleasure lay down his preconceived notions, nor dismiss his hopes and fears by a mere act of volition, nor cast off his attachments or antipathies when he chooses, and it would consequently be idle in him to consider these things as duties on his own part, or to enforce them on others; yet he has in his power one very important means of indirectly attaining the end in view, or, at least, of neutralizing in a great measure the sinister influence of his passions and prejudices: he can at all times make himself perfectly acquainted with the state of his own mind. If he has a strong conviction on any subject, he can examine whether it has been the result of regular deduction, or whether the opinion lies in his understanding unconnected with any premises, just as it was placed there by others; if he loves or dislikes a doctrine, self-introspection will show him the extent and the origin of the affection: if he desires or dreads any particular issue of the investigation on which he is called to enter, the intensity and the foundation of this prospective emotion will appear to his 'inward eye.' By thus making the condition of his own mind the subject of scrutiny, he can scarcely fail to reduce the influence of such moral and intellectual prepossessions as are lodged there.

The more closely he examines himself, the freer he will be from the danger of improper bias.

Whatever effect an examination of this kind may have on his habitual feelings, it seems eminently adapted to loosen the power of all preconceived notions. To be fully aware that the opinions we have hitherto held exist in our understandings, simply because they have been put there by some external agency, and not as the result of any process of reasoning on our own parts; that they are, in fact, as far as we are concerned, mere matters of chance, while it cannot fail to make us eager to rescue ourselves from so unenviable a condition, is almost tantamount to the power of extirpating them from our minds before we commence the proposed investigation. Conceive, for a moment, the effect which must ensue from the inquirer attaining to a clear perception that the opinions he entertains on any given subject lie in his mind unsupported by the slightest evidence. He believes them; he is fond of them; but in vain does he cast about for any reasons on which they repose.

Here, then, is the precise and the only duty of the inquirer in relation to the state of his own mind — to examine closely what that state is with regard to the subject which he is called to investigate. This preliminary task is no doubt sufficiently difficult to all those who have not been accustomed to reflect on the phenomena of consciousness; and to them the duty may not appear very perspicuous or very determinate. It is, nevertheless, incumbent on them as far as their ability reaches; it is also part of that process of inquiry through which they must pass in order to attain the benefits of truth; and even to be aware that such a self-examination is requisite, is a step in advance to their object.

To men of thought, to philosophers, to those who pro-

fess to teach any subject, and especially to all who are avowedly engaged in the pursuit of truth for its own sake, such a close investigation into the state of their own minds is not more an imperative duty, than one of the most beneficial and salutary tasks which they can undertake. Always to commence at this point, will be found an immense advantage, not only in prosecuting the inquiry into which they are to enter, but in showing them how exceedingly few are the subjects on which even the most enlightened minds have any pretensions to being positive and dogmatical.

What is the intellectual condition in which a man of even the most liberal education finds himself on attaining a mature age, and being roused to independent reflection? He awakes in the midst of a chaos of heterogeneous opinions, which have been determined to be what they are by a long series of causes, and have been received into his mind by unconscious adoption, or fixed by assiduous inculcation, as objects of affection and reverence. He finds himself (to use the expressive language of Turgot) in a labyrinth into which he has been conveyed blindfold. Upon the grounds of these opinions he has scarcely bestowed a thought, and yet has probably often contended for them with a warmth, a resentment at opposition, and positiveness of language, which rational conviction shrinks from assuming.

Placed in this disadvantageous condition, let him invariably make it his first business, when he is required by duty, or led by inclination, to investigate a subject, to examine the origin and grounds of the affections and prejudices of his own mind relating to it. Nothing will more powerfully tend to disenchant him of his delusions, or to save him from that arrogant presumption in himself and condemnation of others, which is one of the commonest

failings both of the vulgar and the refined. A dogmatical assertion of opinions will scarcely be the fault of one who continually falls back on his own understanding, to ask whether he holds the positions he is maintaining, from having mastered the evidence in their favor, or from their having been fixed in his belief without any evidence at all.

SECTION II.

DUTIES IN RELATION TO THE EVIDENCE.

However difficult or impracticable it may be for a man to bring himself into the most favorable state of mind for the attainment of truth, before he commences any inquiry to which his duty may summon him; the next thing is largely, if not entirely, in his power, and that is the mode of conducting the examination. Here his path is plain, and his duty, although far from easy, is manifest. The only legitimate end of inquiry is to arrive at the truth; and the most likely means of attaining that end is to pursue it with adequate diligence and rigorous impartiality. This, then, is his simple duty, to examine fully and fairly. The same reasons which require him to enter upon any investigation, demand that it shall be properly and efficiently conducted. As without examination he can have no valid assurance that he is teaching truth, or acting on just principles, so he can have no valid assurance on these points, unless the examination be prosecuted in the likeliest way to bring it to a successful issue. The duty of inquiring at all involves the duty of inquiring in the best practicable manner, and this comprehends the union of adequate application with strict impartiality.

The value of that diligence of examination, which leaves no accessible part of a subject unexplored, is scarcely to

be overrated. When we reflect on the various knowledge required to determine any important question, the number of considerations bearing upon it, the subtilty and complexity of the reasonings to which it may give rise, the apparent contradictions and anomalies which the whole inquiry may present, we shall be sensible how indispensably necessary to the attainment of truth is a sedulous application to the task. To perform it effectually, we must not only merely adopt but think out for ourselves every proposition contained in the chain of argument, as well as satisfy our minds in regard to every alleged fact in the chain of evidence.

No difficult subject (and most subjects likely to call for express investigation are either naturally or factitiously difficult) can be mastered with a cursory attention. It has been well remarked, in reference to the necessity of every one really thinking on these cases for himself, that no complex or very important truth can be transplanted in full maturity from one mind to another; it must be sown, strike root, and go through the whole process of vegetation before it can have a living connection with the new soil, and flourish in complete vigor and development. *

* The exact words of the passage here referred to are as follows: 'No complex or very important truth was ever yet transferred in full development from one mind to another: truth of that kind is not a piece of furniture to be shifted; it is a seed which must be sown and pass through the several stages of growth.' — *Letters to a Young Man whose Education had been neglected.*

Bacon, Locke, and Wollaston, had all, long before, made a similar remark. 'An opinion,' says the latter, 'though ever so true and certain to one man, cannot be transfused into another as true and certain, by any other way but by opening his understanding, and assisting him so to order his conceptions, that he may find the reasonableness of it *within himself*.' — *Religion of Nature*, p. 91.

We are especially apt to be deceived in this respect on subjects relating to morals. The terms employed are such as are daily used in the common intercourse of life, and we imagine we at once comprehend any doctrines which they are the medium of expressing. In physical science, where at every step we are encountered by the difficulties of a technical phraseology, as well as of practical observations and experiments, we immediately feel the necessity of a regular application and progression, of mastering one principle before we proceed to the next, of carrying our object by detail, working our way by vigorous and reiterated efforts. In moral and political questions, on the contrary, we are too apt to be content with mere cursory reading and hasty examination: no difficulties are presented by the language, no unusual terms arrest our progress, no particular experiments demand a pause to verify them, and we glide smoothly along the pages of the profoundest treatise, with an apparently clear apprehension of the various propositions we meet with, but in reality with a vague conception of their full drift and precise meaning. Hence, people are often deluded into fancying themselves competent, after a superficial survey, to pronounce a decision on questions requiring severe study, great nicety of discrimination, and close logical deduction.* These results are partly occasioned also by love of ease, and reluctance to intellectual exertion. On difficult subjects, inquiry, it is not to be concealed, is laborious; and the natural indolence of most men induces them to stop short

* 'The habit,' says a distinguished writer, 'of dwelling upon the verbal expressions of the views of other persons, and of being content with such an apprehension of doctrines as a transient notice can give us, is fatal to firm and clear thought, it indicates wavering and feeble conceptions which are inconsistent with sound physical speculation.'— WHEWELL'S *History of the Inductive Sciences*, vol. i. p. 240.

of that vigorous application which difficulties require for their solution.

But the man who stops short of full research, although he may be fair and impartial as far as he goes, although he may entertain no desires adverse to truth, and may draw correct inferences from the imperfect collection of facts he has made, will probably arrive after all at an unsound conclusion. It is obvious, that if he has not before him all those grounds for decision which adequate diligence might have brought together, he cannot possess the utmost attainable certainty that his judgment is right. In proportion to the deficiency of his investigation in fulness will be, *ceteris paribus*, his liability to error, and his failure to fulfil the obligation resting upon him. An incomplete inquiry must be an incomplete discharge of his duty.

To those inquirers in particular who are engaged in researches, which, if successful, will correct or enlarge existing knowledge, diligent and patient attention to every part of their subject is invaluable. Not a single proposition in the doctrines of others, or in their own deductions, should be suffered to pass without the closest scrutiny.

By long-continued meditation, the most obscure and perplexed points will insensibly become clear. Difficulties will every day crumble before resolute and reiterated assaults.

Persevering diligence in the prosecution of the subject is of such powerful efficacy, that it is scarcely a matter of wonder to find Newton overlooking his own genius, and ascribing his most brilliant discoveries to sheer industry and patient thought. 'I keep,' he said, 'the subject of my inquiry constantly before me, and wait till the first dawning opens gradually, by little and little, into a full and clear light.'

Impartiality of examination is, if possible, of still higher

value than care and diligence. It is of little importance what industry we exert on any subject, if we make all our exertions in one direction, if we sedulously close our minds against all considerations which we dislike, and seek with eagerness for any evidence or argument which will confirm our established or favorite views. A life-long investigation may, in this way, only carry us farther from the truth. What duty and common sense require of us is, that our attention be equally given to both sides of every question, that we make ourselves thoroughly acquainted with all the conflicting arguments, that we be severely impartial in weighing the evidence for each, and suffer no bias to seduce us into supine omission on the one hand, or inordinate rapacity for proof on the other.

This, too, is any thing but a light and easy task. It can be performed to a certain extent by every honest and sincere inquirer; but perhaps to achieve it in perfection, would require a mind at once enlarged, sagacious, candid, disinterested, and upright. A man who perfectly accomplishes it, however, cannot fail to command the esteem of his fellow-men by the worth and dignity of his conduct. It is painful to think that such an example is rare; that instead of it we usually find the mere partisan, one evidently engaged, not in the pursuit of truth, but in searching for every possible argument to support and confirm a conclusion, predetermined by his interest, his prejudices, or his position in society.

What a contrast do these two present! — one candid, upright, fearless of the issue of the investigation because solely intent on truth, searching on all sides, refusing no evidence, anxious only that every circumstance should be brought out in its true colors and dimensions, and free from anger against opposition; the other directing all his acuteness to one side, prying into those sources of infor-

mation alone where he imagines he shall find what is agreeable to his wishes, stating every thing both to himself and to others with the art and exaggeration of a hired pleader, sounding forth the immaculate merits of his cause, and filled with rancor against all who do not range themselves under the same banners. Or, perhaps, instead of this angry partisan, we see (what is equally a humiliating spectacle) the timid inquirer moving cautiously along, as if alarmed at the sound of his own footsteps, shunning every track not palpably well-trodden, and looking at any evidence that may chance to cross his path foreign to his ordinary train of thought, with as much trepidation as he would experience were he to see an apparition rising out of the earth.

The annals of the world abound with instances of the most determined obstinacy, in turning away from sources of information which it was apprehended might subvert established opinions. After the telescope had been invented, some of the followers of Aristotle positively refused to look through the new instrument, because it threatened the overthrow of their master's doctrines and authority, or rather of their own dogmas; and when by means of this great invention Galileo had discovered the satellites of Jupiter, they were infatuated enough to attempt to *write down* these unwelcome additions to the solar system.

From the lenient manner in which the faults of negligent and unfair investigation are generally treated, it might seem that they were of small consequence and light turpitude. To pronounce them so, however, under the circumstances described in a former chapter, would be little better than an express contradiction. When any one is called to the duty of examination at all, whether the subject concerns the relation in which he stands to God, or has an important bearing on his conduct to his

fellow-creatures, or is a matter on which he has to give instruction to others, the vices of partial and inadequate examination must by the force of the terms be of serious moment. The consequences of bad inquiry will be bad practice. Misery will tread on the heels of ignorance; the conduct of the man will be infected with his errors of thought, and society will suffer from a course which it has not sufficient knowledge or virtue to condemn.

If, quitting single cases and partial inquiries, we raise our views to the effects of these vices in all those great investigations which concern the human race at large, we shall perceive that far from being of trivial consequence they are sources of extensive evil, and that this evil must be prolonged and aggravated by considering them in any other light. They are nothing less, in fact, than impediments to the natural progress of mankind in becoming acquainted with what is for their real happiness, and consequently they are impediments to that happiness itself.

The only improvement in the condition of mankind, that can be rationally expected, is from their gradually emancipating themselves from the various errors and multiform ignorance in which they are involved. Society commences in barbarism, it becomes very slowly enlightened: every step of the progress implies the discovery of new truths, or a departure from errors to which it has been accustomed, from notions established, and practices consecrated by years. To accomplish this, to discover truth and to detect error, investigation is the direct means: the more free, diligent, and impartial the inquiry, the surer the progress, and the faster the improvement.*

* 'When the question,' says an eminent German philosopher, 'is about the greatest evils that urge the human race, we always return to the truth of truths: mankind cannot be helped unless they become better; they can never become better unless they become wiser; but

It follows, that to deny the importance of investigation, and the importance of conducting it with diligence and fairness, is to deny the value of the means of improvement, and of using those means in the best manner. If then we are under any obligation to consult the general welfare, diligence and fairness in our inquiries are not only recommendable qualities, which it would be well for us to exercise, but they are positive duties, which we cannot neglect without actual culpability.

And further it is of great importance to our moral principles in general, that we should cultivate the spirit of fairness in research and controversy. While there is so much laxity and want of discrimination in regard to candor and uprightness in the prosecution of our inquiries, while research on the most momentous subjects may be neglected or perverted with impunity, we cannot expect to find the spirit of integrity carried to its highest perfection in the commerce of life. From one who exhibits a want of proper diligence and scrupulous impartiality in his treatment of evidence on religious, moral, or political questions, it would be vain to look for uncompromising integrity when he is called to adjust the contending claims of his fellow-men, or to decide between his own rights and those of others. In both cases the same qualities are demanded, and if they are neglected in the one, they will be weakened in the other. Nothing, on the other hand, can more exalt the moral character than a fervent and faithful pursuit of truth.

they can never become wiser unless they think rightly of every thing on which their weal or woe depends; and they will never learn to think rightly, so long as they do not think freely.' — WIELAND *on Liberty of Reasoning*.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ISSUE OF INQUIRY.

The important questions regarding the obligation to enter upon the pursuit of truth, and the duties to be fulfilled in the pursuit itself, having been treated of, it remains to consider the final issue.

When an inquiry respecting any particular point has been completed, an impression of some sort or other will have been left on the mind of the inquirer; he will either have attained a clear and definite conviction, or he will be more or less in doubt and perplexity. The nature of this final impression will have been determined by the considerations presented to his mind during the process, and these considerations will have been themselves antecedently determined by various circumstances besides his conduct in the inquiry, such as the extent of his previous knowledge, the accessibility of evidence, the natural powers of his understanding, and other causes. Many of these are altogether beyond his control; what is alone within his power is the full and fair research already described; and although this is the direct and most effectual means of reaching a just conclusion, it is not always sufficient to counteract the adverse influences in operation at the same time. The most faithful devotion to inquiry will sometimes fail in arriving at the truth.

It manifestly follows from all this, that the issue of any

investigation cannot be the proper ground of moral approbation or censure. It is the manner of conducting the process to which alone these sentiments are applicable. But it is also manifest that, if the inquirer should be ultimately left in error, although without any fault of his own, he cannot reap the benefits of truth. He may be in this, as in many other affairs, at once virtuous in his conduct and unfortunate in the result of his exertions.

After all that has been already urged, these positions seem almost too plain to require elucidation; yet so prevailing and inveterate is the error of supposing a man's opinions to constitute proper grounds of moral commendation or reprehension, that it is necessary to expose it at some length. Nor will a few words be afterwards inappropriately bestowed in elucidating the distinction, not always adverted to, between exemption from merit and demerit on account of our opinions, and exemption from the natural consequences to which our opinions lead. A clear comprehension of this distinction seems requisite for a complete view of the morality of investigation.

SECTION I.

THE ISSUE OF INQUIRY NOT A MATTER OF DUTY.

The preceding discussions, if they have at all succeeded in their object, clearly show that the whole of our duty in relation to the process of inquiry is comprehended in adequate and impartial examination, in the first place, of the state of our own minds in reference to the subject of inquiry; and, secondly, examination of the subject itself and the evidence appertaining to it. It necessarily follows from this, as already stated, that our duty is not implicated in the result, whatever it may be; that when we are under

obligation to investigate any subject, it is incumbent upon us to do it with diligence and fairness, but not to arrive at any one conclusion rather than another.

This latter truth, or rather this negative aspect of the one great truth which it has been the object of the preceding arguments to establish, claims attention even more perhaps than the other. To understand at all times what our duty requires from us is universally acknowledged to be important; but it is sometimes overlooked that it is no less important to know what our duty does *not* require. It may be questioned, indeed, whether more evil has not arisen to the human race from their regarding useless and pernicious actions and events not within their power, as exacted by moral obligation, than from their leaving out of the code of morality such as are of a contrary character. The mischievousness of these imaginary duties ought to be clearly apprehended in connection with the subject before us, and, as a general truth, demands a passing exposition.

With regard to pernicious actions, a syllable would be superfluous to show that it must be fraught with mischief to consider them as duties, and consequently both to encourage and to commit them. And with regard to useless actions, to erect them into so many imperative obligations, besides creating confusion in our moral sentiments, where perfect distinctness and precision are of the highest value, and inflicting injury (as the prevalence of error cannot fail to do) on our reasoning powers, brings upon mankind all the evils of needless restraint and profitless compunction.

It is equally, if not more, pernicious to regard ourselves and others as responsible for circumstances or events over which we have no control, which we can neither produce nor prevent. The unhappiness reciprocally sustained and

inflicted in consequence of the omission of imaginary duties not in any body's power, the irksome constraint, the doubts and fears and misgivings, the disputes and dissensions proceeding from such erroneous feelings of moral obligation, are attested by the melancholy history of human superstitions.*

Men are peculiarly liable to erroneous sentiments of this kind, when the scene of the events in question is partly or wholly in the mind — when they are events of a sensitive or intellectual nature, or external actions so mixed up with mental processes, as to baffle the efforts of ordinary discrimination to separate them.

It is no wonder, therefore, that the mistake has been committed, which regards men as lying under an obligation to arrive in their researches at a predetermined conclusion. In the prosecution of any inquiry there are certain acts instrumental in attaining the object in view, which are wholly in our power, while closely connected with such acts there are intellectual processes going on and states of mind produced not within our control; and so long as these distinct things are confounded together, approbation and censure cannot fail to be misapplied, and erroneous feelings of duty engendered. It is, accordingly, the want of a clear and accurate discrimination of voluntary acts and involuntary mental phenomena, which appears to have given rise to the doctrine that it is incumbent on every inquirer to arrive at certain pre-appointed conclu-

* 'The greatest burden in the world,' says the author of Paradise Lost, 'is superstition, not only of ceremonies in the church, but of *imaginary and scare-crow sins* at home. What greater weakening, what more subtle stratagem against our Christian warfare, when besides the gross body of real transgressions to encounter, we shall be terrified by *a vain and shadowy menacing of faults that are not?*'— *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce.*

sions; or, in other words, that a man's duty does not consist in diligence and fairness of examination, but in his regarding certain doctrines as true or false. What these doctrines are, is indeed by no means settled; but that there are some which it is a duty to be convinced of, and others which it is incumbent upon us to disbelieve, almost all men unite in pronouncing. When this remarkable and mischievous notion is fathomed, it amounts to no more in each instance than a theory on the part of any one who holds it, that it is the duty of other human beings to regard a certain proposition as true or false, because he himself regards it in that light; that they are not only logically wrong, but morally criminal, in drawing any inference different from his own.

The self-conceit implied in this theory might induce any one to pass it by with a smile, had it not become a dogma which lies at the bottom of much human misery, and therefore deserving of serious confutation. It will not be difficult to show how utterly inconsistent it is with the conclusions already established in the present treatise.

If there is any correctness in those conclusions, it is our duty, when doctrines or propositions are in certain cases presented to our minds, to inquire into their truth. Whether these are new propositions, or such as we have held without investigation from the first dawn of consciousness, is not material. Circumstances present them to our minds as demanding inquiry into their truth, and our duty is to examine. It is obvious that in this stage of the business, at all events, it is not our duty either to receive or to reject them. To examine them is to investigate whether they have a title to belief or not: and if we are bound to ascertain whether they have claims on our credence, it would be absurd to argue that it is incumbent on us to begin the investigation by admitting or denying

the claims into the validity of which we are inquiring. If there is any such admission or denial obligatory upon us, it must be at a subsequent stage. We proceed, we will suppose, in the examination with adequate diligence and strict impartiality. In this process there is evidently still no duty of belief or disbelief to perform. All that we have to do is to be fair, candid, and diligent. We finally close the investigation, and the state of our understandings in relation to the subject examined (on the supposition that the process has been conducted in the manner described) is obviously the unavoidable and involuntary result; that is, it is the necessary issue of an investigation entered into because it was our duty to enter into it, and conducted throughout in the manner which our duty prescribed. That this result should be a given, a pre-ordained result, cannot therefore be justly or consistently required.

It would be an extrordinary thing indeed for any one to say to us, 'It is your duty to inquire into this doctrine, and to conduct the examination with strict fairness and integrity; but although you do all this, unless your examination terminate in a belief (or disbelief) of the doctrine, you will be morally culpable.'

It will probably be objected, 'Your culpability arises from this, that you did not do all in your power to believe (or disbelieve) the doctrine.' Do all in our power to believe or disbelieve? Why should we? On what grounds of duty? Previous to the examination the doctrine is not to us a truth or a falsehood, it is merely a proposition offered to our scrutiny: why then should we wish to believe it, and do all in our power to believe it, or the contrary? The proper wish on such an occasion, as we have seen, is not to find any proposition true or false, but to find the truth; and in regard to doing all in our power to believe or disbelieve, if this implies, as it obviously does,

paying more attention to the considerations on one side of the question than to those on the other, it would be a positive violation of duty, an infraction of that rigid impartiality which has already been established as an imperative obligation.*

But the objector replies, 'You have suffered your passions to interfere; it is perversity of heart and malignity of disposition, which have rendered propositions credible or incredible to you, that have been rejected or admitted by others.' If this accusation is meant to apply to the manner in which we have designedly treated the evidence, then as by the supposition we have conducted the examination with fairness and diligence, it is manifestly out of place. But if the intention of it is to charge us with being possessed by passions, which have involuntarily on our part exaggerated some portions of the evidence and weakened others, and thus led to erroneous conclusions, we reply: 1. This is a mere gratuitous assumption. 2. It is at all events an involuntary error which is charged upon us. 3. Since by the supposition we have conducted the examination with perfect fairness, notwithstanding our suffering under these passions, the greater is our merit; we have shown an extraordinary degree of moral self-control. 4. The circumstance of having conducted it fairly ought to be received in the absence of all other evidence, as conclusive proof that no such passions have prevailed. 5. As we have just the same grounds for throwing such an imputation on our opponent, we may

* 'An inclination to favor, in any degree, however small, one side in any question, is evidently not an inclination to do *strict and impartial* justice upon it; but the contrary. And a disposition to put a favorable construction on facts or arguments, is a disposition to put *an erroneous* construction upon them.' — *An Introduction to the Study of Moral Evidence*, by Rev. James E. Gambier, 3d ed. p. 74.

with equal fairness suppose, that in forming an opinion different from ours, he has been influenced by some of these reprehensible passions.

At this point the objector will probably say, 'You have made suppositions which I cannot allow; you have supposed that an investigation may be conducted with fullness, fairness, and impartiality, and not end in the preordained result, in the prescribed opinion: now this I deny. If the investigation had been diligently and fairly prosecuted, there is only one opinion in which it could have ended. That it has terminated differently is a full proof of some vice in the process.'

This we believe is a correct representation of what passes in the minds of many of those individuals who condemn others as morally culpable for their opinions. Tacitly assuming themselves to be unerringly in the right, they conclude that others could not have differed from them had they adequately and impartially examined.

To an objector of this class it is easy to answer: 'We might with equal fairness and propriety charge the same vice upon you. What reason can you have for maintaining that all fair and diligent examination must end in the establishment of your opinion, which we may not have for asserting the same thing in favor of our own?'

He may possibly reply: 'The reasons for my opinion are superlatively strong. It is impossible to conceive that any one who candidly examines can resist them; they have convinced the best and greatest minds; they have never been refuted.'

We answer; 'All these phrases are only expressions of the strength of your own conviction. As to the reasons for your opinion, we have examined them, and they appear to us either intrinsically unsound or outweighed by opposite considerations. Your conviction of their force is not

greater than that which we entertain of the strength of the arguments on our side of the question. Our opinion, too, has been held by men of powerful minds; and if it had not, there is nothing in the circumstance of powerful minds having held an opinion which can possibly strengthen the direct evidence in its favor to one who examines it. To one who does not examine, authority may be a valid argument; to one who does, authority in opposition to his own views is nothing but an inducement to examine more closely, to suspect unperceived fallacies, to seek for additional evidence, to review all his own inferences, and try every part of the chain which connects them with acknowledged premises. You will perceive, therefore, that we have as great a right to adopt the language of infallibility as you have.'

Such an objector as we have here supposed is thus evidently driven to the untenable position of making the coincidence or discrepancy of the opinion of any inquirer with his own opinion, the criterion whether the inquiry has been properly conducted.

This it is obvious can never be admissible. It is both logically and morally unfair and arrogant. In all arguments the disputants are to be placed on equal terms; nothing must be granted to one that is not to another. If this sort of procedure were conceded to any, it must be conceded to all, and it is easy to see that all argument would be at an end. But the good sense of mankind, with a happy inconsistency, often saves them when their personal interests are not implicated, from the legitimate consequences of their own principles of action, when those interests are at stake. While every one might arrogate such a privilege to himself, yet when fairly brought before him, he would see the folly of a claim to it on the part of another, and compel the unreasonable usurper to desist from the palpable absurdity of his pretensions.

In general, however, people who regard others as guilty of an offence in holding a different opinion from their own, do not consider the heretical opinion as a proof of inadequate or unfair investigation, and therefore to be condemned, but as directly criminal in itself. Theirs is a blind unreflecting prejudice which is quite innocent of the suspicion that such a thing as the duty of investigation exists either for themselves or their neighbors.

It will commonly be found that those who are most virulent against others for their opinions, so far from having personally discharged this great duty, are too ignorant even to have attained to the conception of it.

The consequences of the false theory here exposed — of considering that the duty of mankind consists in the belief of certain prescribed doctrines, instead of placing that duty in the diligence and honesty of their inquiries — have been lamentable beyond description, and form perhaps the most forcible illustration of the evils of error that can be found in the annals of the world. Besides lying like an incubus on the intellect of the race and paralyzing its powers, this pernicious error has been at the bottom of that bigoted intolerance which has so long embittered life and disgraced humanity, and which will continue to do both, till mankind awake to a knowledge of their own nature, and to a perception of the value of truth.

It cannot be too freely proclaimed, that whenever and on whatever subject inquiry becomes necessary or obligatory on human beings, the only duty to be performed consists in full and impartial investigation, and has no dependence on the result. When a man has accomplished this, he may have failed in attaining the truth; but he will not only have satisfied the requirements of his own conscience, but have deserved the approbation of every wise and just judge.

This conclusion cannot be better enforced than in the remarkable declaration of the 'ever-memorable' John Hales, in his letter to Archbishop Laud. The passage has been often quoted, but it will yet bear many repetitions.

'The pursuit of truth,' says this single-minded writer, 'hath been my only care, ever since I first understood the meaning of the word. For this I have forsaken all hopes, all friends, all desires, which might bias me, and hinder me from driving right at what I aimed. For this I have spent my money, my means, my youth, my age, and all I have, that I might remove from myself that censure of Tertullian, — *Suo vitio quis quid ignorat?* If with all this cost and pains, my purchase is but error, I may safely say, to err has cost me more than it has many to find the truth: and truth itself shall give me this testimony at last, that if I have missed of her, it is not my fault, but my misfortune.'

SECTION II.

THE ISSUE OF INQUIRY ATTENDED BY ITS NATURAL CONSEQUENCES.

Every view of the subject combines to show that an inquirer, having accomplished a full and impartial investigation, has performed his entire duty, and cannot be justly either praised or blamed for the conclusion to which he has been brought.

In performing his duty he has also been employing the most likely or rather the only rational means in his power to attain the truth; but since the attainment of truth is merely the probable, not the necessary consequence of the wise and virtuous course he has pursued, he may after all have fallen into error, and in this event, although he will be perfectly free from culpability, he will not be exempt

from the natural consequences of being mistaken. We have already largely insisted on the blessings of truth, and it is here scarcely needful to say that the belief of a truth is generally speaking a necessary condition for enjoying certain benefits connected with it; while the belief of an error usually draws down a number of evils upon him who entertains it. If any one for example distrusts the efficacy of a medicine in a disease which it can really cure, he may suffer under the loss of health, while an efficient remedy is within his reach. If he believes in the harmlessness of a poison, he may lose his life from an erroneous conception of the properties of the noxious substance.

Thus accurate opinions or just conclusions, are, in some case, the indispensable conditions, and in others the probable means for obtaining certain benefits and avoiding certain evils; and he who after the most faithful investigation is not fortunate enough to have arrived at the true result, will lose the advantages which would have flowed from a more accurate comprehension of the subject.

If this law seems in some degree harsh, it is the same which prevails in all pursuits in which mankind can embark, and it serves to show in a strong light the importance of truth. Moreover the conscientious, although (in the issue) unfortunate inquirer is not without his reward. Besides the approbation of his own conscience for the course he has pursued, both his moral and intellectual powers will have been invigorated by the meritorious effort, and rendered more efficient for other investigations; nor is it to be overlooked that although unsuccessful in his principal object, his views will have inevitably become more comprehensive and accurate on many subordinate points. No right-minded effort to gain knowledge is altogether fruitless.

In the circumstances here described, we have before us

a man who has pursued a meritorious line of conduct, but who notwithstanding his merit has been unsuccessful and unfortunate. Generally speaking in those cases where this combination is witnessed, the feelings excited in the spectator are admiration, sympathy, and a desire to console the sufferer. A virtuous man struggling with adversity has been said by an ancient writer to be a sight worthy even of the gods.

But when the union of merit and misfortune happens to take place, or is supposed to have taken place, in the pursuit of truth, distaste and odium most commonly usurp the seat of these favorable sentiments. The mistake apparently more than obliterates the merit, and we resent it as an unpardonable offence, or more correctly speaking, perhaps, we are insensible to the merit and look only to the mistake. Strange that because a man is innocently involved in the evils of error (a calamity in itself sufficiently severe), his fellow-creatures should feel a strong disposition and often make the most strenuous efforts to increase the bitterness of his fate!

There can be no question that such a sentiment is barbarous and misplaced, and that the proper, the enlightened, the noble feelings for the occasion, when it really happens, are compassion for the misfortune and admiration for the virtue which has not been able to avert it. A barbarous sentiment of this kind could not be maintained, except by profound ignorance of the nature of morality and of the constitution of the human mind.

'It is as absurd,' says a distinguished moralist, 'to entertain an abhorrence of intellectual inferiority or error, however extensive or mischievous, as it would be to cherish a warm indignation against earthquakes and hurricanes;' *

* Dissertation on Ethical Philosophy, by Sir James Mackintosh, § 6.

but the absurdity becomes more exquisite when, as it generally happens, the imputation of error or inferiority is the work of self-conceit, or sheer delusion.

In the next chapter the course of the discussion will lead us to consider with more minuteness the proper conduct to be pursued and the proper sentiments to be cherished by human beings towards each other in all that relates to the search after truth, as well as to point out more precisely the errors and violations of morality which in this great department of action they are apt to commit.

CHAPTER V.

DUTIES TOWARDS OTHERS IN RELATION TO THE PURSUIT OF TRUTH.

WHILE it is our duty to enter upon the investigation of certain subjects, and conduct the inquiry with diligence and impartiality, we may be called upon by various circumstances to exercise an influence over our fellow-men who lie under the same obligations, or who have voluntarily undertaken the pursuit of truth in some department of knowledge.

There appear to be two principal methods in which this may be rightly done. The first is by advising and encouraging others to undertake and prosecute inquiry in the proper spirit and manner, and manifesting our sentiments of their conduct in these respects; the second is by communicating to them the information we possess, the facts and inferences which have presented themselves to our own minds, and thus helping them to their ultimate object — the attainment of truth. The first may be briefly designated as Moral Influence; the second as Intellectual Assistance: the one supplying motives to search for truth, the other means for succeeding in the pursuit. These kinds of influence may obviously be exercised singly or together. Perhaps they are most frequently conjoined, but it will conduce to the perspicuity of the discussion to treat them separately as far as things often intermingled can be considered apart.

In this survey the improper as well as the proper exercise of our influence and control over the minds and actions of others will also come into view, and lead to a passing notice of that brute violence which is sometimes called in to its aid or substituted in its place.

From their very nature the questions here proposed relate chiefly, although not exclusively, to the conduct of people of intelligence, who are presumed to have gone through the process of inquiry; but the treatment of the subject would be incomplete, if we did not likewise expressly advert to the peculiar obligations incumbent on that much larger class who may be denominated non-inquirers: and we shall accordingly point out the distinguishing features of their case in the concluding section.

SECTION I.

MORAL INFLUENCE.

In various cases it may be an act of laudable kindness, and in some even our absolute duty, to offer advice and direction to others, or to express our sentiments in regard to their mode of treating important subjects, or in other words in regard to their entering on inquiry and their conduct in the investigation. We may be called upon in such instances to encourage or discourage, to recommend, to warn, to approve, or to condemn.

The influence we may thus exercise over the minds of our fellow-creatures is frequently very extensive and lasting in its consequences upon their happiness, and hence it becomes of great moment that it should be properly used; that our counsel and moral sentiments should be applied to promote the practice of virtues suitable to the occasion and thence the attainment of truth.

The path of wisdom and morality in this matter is so plain that it is truly wonderful how it should ever be missed. Whatever assistance we here render to any one, whatever counsel or encouragement we give, should manifestly be with the view of inducing and enabling him to discharge his duty by entering upon any required investigation, and pursuing it with diligence and fairness. We should endeavor to infuse into his mind the ennobling love of truth. And if we have at any time occasion to express our moral sentiments in regard to this part of his conduct, it is equally plain that our approbation or the reverse should be given according to the degree in which these virtues have been exercised or neglected.

If it is our own duty, as we think has by this time been pretty clearly established, to enter upon express investigation in certain circumstances, and to do all in our power by an impartial and rigorous examination to arrive at the truth, it must be incumbent upon us to counsel and assist others to do the same where we are at all called upon to interfere; and if direct advice and positive assistance are not in our power, or not demanded by the occasion, we should be especially on our guard how we throw any discouragement or obstacle in their way, or any temptation to neglect or pervert the discharge of the obligation under which they lie. Any act done by us to seduce, or deter or prevent them from performing that duty of inquiry which is equally incumbent on them as it is on ourselves, and from thus securing the enjoyment of those advantages which only truth attained by inquiry can bring, must obviously be immoral and reprehensible.

Nothing, however, is more common than virtual if not direct recommendations to shun the duties of inquiry; nothing less extraordinary than marks of disapproval and, dislike when those duties have been faithfully discharged.

What is the conduct of many of those who take upon themselves the office of public instruction, who assume to be the guides and counsellors of their fellow-creatures? Do they recommend that on any important question you should pay equal attention to both sides of the controversy? that you should read the books which militate against their own opinions as well as such as have been produced in their favor? that you should scrupulously weigh the conflicting evidence? that you should endeavor to be strictly impartial and scrutinize their own arguments with as much severity as you employ on those of their opponents? Do they urge, do they even mention, the duty of perfect fairness of investigation? Do they insist upon the duty of inquiry at all? Is their language, 'Read, examine for yourselves, draw your own inferences, diligently and impartially investigate; we present you with our conclusions and the reasons on which they are founded; we believe them to be valid and irrefutable, but scrutinize them closely, put them to the test; discharge your own duty, and assist us by pointing out any fallacies you may descry; let us be coadjutors in the grand cause of truth?' Is it not, on the contrary, 'The doctrine we announce is the only one which can be free from error; avoid all those writings which are opposed to it as you would avoid the contamination of the plague; do every thing in your power to banish any adverse suggestions from your own minds; turn from all discordant evidence; fly from the danger of impartial inquiry; shun the moral turpitude of doubting what we teach; fear and confide?'

If, however, the positions we have laid down are true, if it is a man's duty to examine, and to examine with diligence and impartiality, it is also his duty to recommend the same course to others. If it would be morally

wrong in himself to neglect inquiry, to abstain from the investigation of both sides of a question, to bestow all his attention on arguments of one tendency, to banish as far as he could all opposite suggestions instead of giving them a fair and candid examination, then he must stand convicted of a moral offence for urging upon others the same conduct. On this point there can be no compromise. It is either right or wrong to be partial in our investigations. If it is wrong to be partial, it is wrong to recommend and enforce partiality; it is a departure from the distinct line of duty, a deviation from candid, upright, and honorable conduct. Let every man, on proper occasions, urge his opinions with all the force of argument in his power; let him explain them with all the skill of which he is master; let him expose the weakness of contrary allegations without scruple; but the moment he begins to teach the sacred necessity of thinking as he does, to set forth the guilt of dissenting from his doctrine, and to insist on the avoidance of all opposite considerations, that moment he commits an offence against the moral law of truth.

No further elucidation seems requisite of that direct assistance one human being ought to give to another by counsel and encouragement in the task of inquiry; but a few more words may be separately bestowed on those moral sentiments, the expression of which, while it constitutes in itself a species of advice, is generally mixed with it, and powerfully operates to encourage or discourage any conduct to which it is applied.

If, in regard to inquiry, the moral approbation and disapprobation of mankind were rightly distributed, they would fall exclusively on the conduct exhibited in undertaking and prosecuting inquiry, and not on the results; or, still worse, on the opinions lodged in the mind without any inquiry at all. Whenever they are thus justly distri-

buted, the highest encouragement is given to diligence and honesty of investigation. But if men award their praise or their censure to mere opinions, without reference to the mode of acquiring them, the effect is that such opinions are ostensibly adopted or repudiated by numbers of people whether really held or not; and the pursuit of truth, instead of being regarded as a duty, is abandoned as a fruitless, a blameworthy, and even a highly criminal enterprise.

Hence nothing can be of higher importance to the cause of truth and virtue than distinct views on this point, and a rigid adherence to the rule of approving and censuring men for their conduct in regard to inquiry, and not for their opinions. No greater injury can be inflicted on morality than stigmatizing the proper discharge of the duty of investigation as an offence, on account of its results not being in accordance with prevailing notions. It is no doubt difficult in many cases to judge whether a man's conduct has been honest or not in the examination of any question; and it may therefore be alleged, that the rule here recommended is too nice for use; but the reply is obvious, that where evidence is wanting we are under no obligation, or rather it is positively unjust, to proceed to judgment. We are not to apply a wrong rule, because it is difficult to apply the right one. In the great majority of cases, it is not the province of human beings to pronounce sentence on each other's conduct in the business of inquiry. The requisite evidence is generally beyond their reach, or too subtle for their grasp; and the happiness of the world would be incalculably increased, if they strictly confined their approbation and disapprobation to useful and pernicious actions directly and visibly affecting each other's welfare, without attempting to intrude their moral sentiments where they cannot be applied

with any certainty. 'It is impossible,' says Locke, 'for you or me or any man to know whether another has done his duty in examining the evidence on both sides, when he embraces that side of the question, which we, perhaps upon other views, judge false; and therefore we can have no right to punish or persecute him for it. In this, whether or how far any one is faulty, must be left to the Searcher of hearts, the great and righteous Judge of all men, who knows all their circumstances, all the powers and workings of their minds, where it is they sincerely follow, and by what default they at any time miss truth; and he, we are sure, will judge uprightly.' *

In those cases where we are able to form a judgment of the conduct exhibited in the examination of a question, it is not, at all events, by the bare opinions of the inquirer at the close, that we can be furnished with the requisite light. Whatever other criteria may assist us, these can never perform that office; we must resort, in truth, to a very different method. Except a man's own express declarations or confessions, or the palpable existence of external motives of interest or passion, there appear to be only two sets of circumstances by which we may guide our judgment of his conduct in inquiry.

First, we may form a general presumption from a man's known personal qualities and habits. We may, for example, fairly presume, that by a man of strict integrity in other matters, no wilful partiality has been exercised in the examination of any question which he has been called to investigate. In the absence of express evidence to the contrary, this would be the only just inference. A man's personal qualities and habits, however, are known only to a few, and even when known

* Third Letter for Toleration, Works, vol. v. p. 299.

they cannot be considered as specific evidence of particular facts. We have much more exact grounds for deciding on the fairness or unfairness of his investigations in the second set of circumstances referred to when they occur, namely, the qualities which he actually exhibits in communicating his opinions to others. Diligence, candor, uprightness, impartiality on the one hand, and indolence, disingenuousness, unfairness on the other, are qualities which belong as well to the mode of stating to others the evidence and arguments on any subject, as to the mode of conducting the inquiry, and reveal the character of those efforts which have been made in the secrecy and silence of the closet. From the opinion of any one barely expressed, we can learn absolutely nothing of the process by which it has been formed; but let him produce his explanations, his arguments, his authorities, his moral sentiments, and he will probably furnish us with sufficient data to decide on his diligence, fairness, and integrity; at least we have no concern with the course of application in which his opinion has originated, except so far as these data, and the external evidence already referred to, betray it.

The qualities we have enumerated are often as distinctly displayed in a man's writings or conversation, as they are in any part of his conduct. Who can mistake the language of sincerity and singleness of purpose, for that of interestedness and duplicity? who the colorings and exaggerations of party pleading for the honest exposition of the inquirer after truth?

An eminent French statesman once sarcastically said, that language was given to man to conceal his thoughts. If so, it must be commonly a difficult task to use it for the intended purpose; but he would have still greater difficulty in employing it to conceal his moral qualities.

In any long tissue of sentiment and reasoning, the real properties of the mind can scarcely fail to manifest themselves. It is as impossible for the mean, hypocritical, servile spirit to assume, through any long investigation, the moral carriage of the liberal, the candid, the upright, the noble, as to produce in itself the feelings by which they are animated. The greatest art will not suffice to suppress certain infallible symptoms of what lurks beneath the surface, while it will be totally incapable of counterfeiting, because utterly unconscious of, many other indications, universally attending the qualities which command our esteem and admiration. He who gives utterance to language for the gratification of any unworthy passion, spleen, hatred, revenge, or whatever it may be, may rest assured that the chances are ten thousand to one against a successful concealment of his actuating principle.

Here, then, we have proper grounds for judgment if judgment is necessary, and when we have not these, we have only to refrain from the superfluous officiousness and positive injustice of passing sentence.

The practice of pronouncing on a man's fairness, good feeling, and integrity, not from external evidence, or the usual indications of those qualities, but from the nature of the conclusions at which he has arrived, is the same in spirit as that of sending him to the scaffold for differing from his executioner. Neglecting all the various causes which inevitably generate differences of opinion, and which, in the absence of all evidence to the contrary, ought in each case to be considered as sufficient to account for any discrepancy between one man and another, these mischievous censors can find nothing to which they can ascribe a deviation from their own tenets but perversity of heart or malignity of purpose, and the sole

evidence they look for of these reprehensible dispositions, is that difference of opinion itself.

This is the very essence of intolerance, the very spirit of Smithfield and the Inquisition. But of the coarser forms of persecution exhibited in the exercise of brute force or in penal inflictions, a more appropriate place will be found to speak when we come to the consideration of the duties of governments in relation to the pursuit of truth. Here it will be sufficient to say, what will readily occur to every reader, that if it is wrong to endeavor to hinder or deter any inquirer from a diligent and impartial examination of a question by advice and discouragement, it is *à fortiori* wrong to do it by forcible restraint and by the infliction of penalties; and that if moral reprehension and censure ought never to be applied by one individual to another for his simple opinions, the application of brute coercion or physical suffering to prevent or punish the formation of such opinions is still more vicious. Every argument in the one case applies with tenfold force in the other.

'No one,' says an eminent writer, 'but the religious persecutor,* a mischievous and overgrown child wreaks his vengeance on involuntary, inevitable, compulsory acts or states of the understanding, which are no more effected by blame than the stone which the foolish child beats for hurting him. Reasonable men apply to every thing which they wish to move, the agent which is capable of moving it — force to outward substances, arguments to the understanding, and blame, together with all other motives, whether moral or personal, to the will alone.' †

* This is too unqualified: there are moral, political, literary, and social persecutors, not to mention others, who long to destroy the happiness of such as differ with them in opinion, and often succeed.

† Dissertation on Ethical Philosophy, by Sir James Mackintosh, § 6.

A writer of a very different school from that of the philosopher just quoted, may be cited to show how nearly all enlightened men of the present day agree in the view of the subject here taken, whatever other doctrines they may hold which are really inconsistent with it.

'The principle,' says Dr. Wardlaw, 'which leads men to judge and treat each other, not according to the intrinsic merit of their actions, but according to the accidental and involuntary coincidence of their opinions, is a vile principle.' *

SECTION II.

INTELLECTUAL ASSISTANCE.

The second way of influencing others in the pursuit of truth is by the communication of knowledge — by instruction.

It must frequently happen that a man who has satisfied his own mind on some particular subject, shall be imperatively called upon to assist others whose duty it is to make a similar investigation, by imparting such information as he has himself acquired respecting it. The proper course to be pursued on occasions of this nature, it is not difficult to discover. The great end of that intellectual assistance which he thus renders to others, in the supposed circumstances, is to enable them to arrive at the truth, through the medium of a full and fair investigation. Such an investigation is evidently their duty, as it was originally his own, and what aid he gives should be with the view of promoting it. The most direct and efficient mode of doing so, is simply to lay before them his own view of the question, with the evidence for and against it, without

* Quoted in the Westminster Review, July, 1826.

exaggeration, disguise, or concealment, and thus to suffer the same considerations to operate on their minds which have influenced his own. Put an inquirer in possession of all these, concealing no doubt and no difficulty, no fact and no inference on either side, and you have done all in your power to guide him to the truth, and should any error lurk in the propositions laid before him, you have supplied him with the means of detecting it, by exhibiting the grounds of your opinion and the process through which you connect the conclusion with the premises.

Simple as this proceeding appears, precisely adapted as it must be allowed to be for the attainment of the object in view, and generally followed as it is in all departments of knowledge where the passions and interests of men do not directly interfere, it is systematically superseded in moral and political subjects by two modes of instruction, or rather of intellectual treatment, one consisting in presenting to the mind of the person who is the subject of it the evidence only on one side of a question, and carefully precluding all cognizance of that on the opposite side; the other in teaching conclusions or doctrines without the evidence on which they rest. The first may be called the system of concealment and suppression; the second, that of authoritative inculcation.

Both these modes of proceeding are alike in departing from the line of duty, in debilitating the mind, and interposing obstacles in the way to truth. Although usually joined or jumbled in practice, it will be expedient to treat them separately.

If when one human being is assisting others in their inquiries, his great aim ought to be, as already stated, to enable them to attain truth by the exercise of their faculties in a full and impartial investigation of the question in hand, then to exclude or suppress any part of the evidence

on either side, is directly at variance with the duty of the occasion. It is attempting to make the examination an imperfect one without the cognizance of the parties whom he professes to assist. It is consequently nothing less than a species of imposition at once inconsistent and immoral. The result to their understandings, even when by such means they chance to be guided to the truth, is a view of only one side of the question (which must necessarily be incomplete even as a view of that side), and a conviction insecure, because founded on a narrow and imperfect basis; and when (as is most likely to happen) they are led into error, there is nothing in what has been presented to their minds, or in the method of exercising their faculties, which can at all serve to extricate them from it. The practice tends to preclude the most salutary of all intellectual exercises — turning a question on all sides, and looking at it in all lights. To deprive a mind of this healthful play of its powers is to chain it down to stupidity. Not that this can be effectually accomplished. No mind can be forcibly limited to what is set before it. In disputable questions there are certain doubts and difficulties naturally presenting themselves to the understanding with greater or less distinctness, whatever concealment or suppression may be practised, nor is there any other sure way of putting them to flight, and preventing them from recurring to perplex the inquirer, than unreservedly setting them before him, and enabling him to see their real character. Any other course is ineffectual, disingenuous in itself, and deeply injurious to him.

But even this system, reprehensible as it is, must be considered superior to the practice of authoritative instillation, which consists in teaching mere dogmas, conclusions without the evidence on which they rest, opinions without the reasons on which they are founded; and

which is usually accompanied by directing the utmost fervor of moral approbation to the mere circumstance of these conclusions or opinions lying in the mind unquestioned and unscrutinized.

Besides being open to the objections brought against the practice of concealment and suppression, this course of instruction (if indeed instruction it can in any sense be called), inflicts a still greater injury on the understanding, and when attended by the described discipline of the feelings, perverts the moral sentiments to an extent not generally appreciated. Whenever it is adopted, the reasoning power is obviously altogether unexercised, the habit is generated of receiving propositions without examination or even annexing to them precise ideas, and healthful curiosity and ardor after knowledge are extinguished. No system of stultification can be more completely effectual.* Whether the doctrines so implanted are true or false, is a matter of mere chance as far as the individual is concerned who is subject to the process, and yet he is taught to consider this matter of mere chance as a peculiar merit on his own part, and he finds it draw down upon him the approbation of the world. His understanding is thus benumbed, and his moral sense debased. With opinions so acquired, should he encounter any facts or arguments of a hostile character, he is probably at first filled with senseless resentment, and becomes ultimately perplexed, although incapable of being convinced; or if he happens to possess a more than usual portion of natural acuteness

* Locke, when speaking of 'those whom the ill habit of never exerting their thoughts has disabled,' very aptly describes the effect pointed out in the text: 'the powers of their minds,' he says, 'are starved by disuse, and have lost that reach and strength which nature fitted them to receive from exercise.' — *Conduct of the Understanding*, § 12.

his prejudices give way, because they have not that intellectual support on which the conclusions of a properly disciplined mind can always stand against attack. No man can adequately comprehend a doctrine until he comprehends what can be said against it; but under this system of inculcation the unfortunate disciple does not comprehend even what can be said in its favor.

In both systems one thing is clear; they are founded at once on a distrust of the capacity of the human mind generally to discern truth from error, and on a confidence in one particular exception — the teacher's own infallibility. If you have no distrust of this nature, why not leave the evidence and the whole evidence to make its due impression? If you do not assume infallibility, how are you justified in trying to fix your own opinions on the minds of your fellow-creatures by a process which, in proportion to its effectiveness, precludes all means of their detecting any errors which those opinions may contain? Without infallibility dogmatical inculcation would be at once arrogant and mischievous, but even with infallibility it would not be justifiable, because although on this supposition the conclusions piled up in the understanding would be true, the faculties would be injured by the process,* the truths would lie lifeless in the memory, and there would be no security against the future intrusion of falsehood. The only real security against the invasion of error on those subjects where difference of opinion exists,

* 'An education (if it be so called) in which the memory only retains the verbal expression of results, while the mind does not apprehend the principles of the subject, and therefore cannot even understand the words in which its doctrines are expressed, is of no value whatever to the intellect, but rather, is highly hurtful to the habits of thinking and reasoning.' — *Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences, by the* Rev. W. Whewell, vol. ii. p. 514.

is a full knowledge of the truth, of the premises from which it is deduced, of the process of deduction, and of the fallacy of the arguments opposed to it; and he whose system of instruction should, in any way prevent those to whom he imports his knowledge from arriving at this intellectual condition, even though he were gifted with infallibility, would be inflicting upon them an irreparable injury. How much greater, then, must be the injury, when he has no pretensions to the infallibility he virtually assumes, when he is a mere erring creature like themselves, and in addition to stupefying their faculties, most probably imposes upon them error for truth!

'Is not thought' (it has been eloquently asked) 'the right and duty of all? Is not truth alike precious to all? Is not truth the natural aliment of the mind, as plainly as the wholesome grain is of the body? Is not the mind adapted to thought as plainly as the eye to light, the ear to sound? Who dares to withhold it from its natural action, its natural element and joy? Undoubtedly some men are more gifted than others, and are marked out for more studious lives. *But the work of such men is not to do others' thinking for them, but to help them to think more vigorously and effectually.* Great minds are to make others great. Their superiority is to be used, not to break the multitude to intellectual vassalage, not to establish over them a spiritual tyranny, but to rouse them from lethargy and to aid them to judge for themselves. The light and life which spring up in one soul are to be spread far and wide. Of all treasons against humanity, there is no one worse than his, who employs great intellectual force to keep down the intellect of his less favored brother.' *

* On the Elevation of the Laboring Classes, by Dr. Channing.

SECTION III.

TREATMENT OF THE YOUNG.

The duty of exercising our influence, moral and intellectual, over the minds of others in the fair and straightforward manner pointed out in the preceding sections is of especial force, when the subjects of our influence are the young. Here, if in any case, a conscientious man will be scrupulous in his proceedings. In this, as in other affairs, *maxima debeter pueris reverentia.* 'A mind,' says Channing, 'inspired with reason and conscience, and capable through these endowments of progress in truth and duty, is a sacred thing.'*

Under the designation of principling the minds of children, Locke long ago denounced the practice of instilling certain doctrines into their minds without exhibiting the evidence, or teaching them the duty of examination, and even of connecting the idea of guilt with any doubt or departure from the principles prescribed.

'There is,' says Locke, 'I know, a great fault among all sorts of people of principling their children and scholars; which at last, when looked into, amounts to no more, but making them imbibe their teacher's notions and tenets by an implicit faith, and firmly to adhere to them whether true or false. What colors may be given to this, or of what use it may be when practised upon the vulgar destined to labor, and given up to the service of their bellies, I will not here inquire. But as to the ingenuous part of mankind, whose condition allows them leisure, and letters, and inquiry after truth, I can see no other right way of principling them, but to take heed, as much as may be,

* Character of Napoleon, part ii.

that in their tender years, ideas, that have no natural cohesion, come not to be united in their heads, and that this rule be often inculcated to them to be their guide in the whole course of their lives and studies, viz. that they never suffer any ideas to be joined in their understandings, in any other or stronger combination than what their own nature and correspondence give them; and that they often examine those that they find linked together in their minds; whether this association of ideas be from the visible agreement that is in the ideas themselves, or from the habitual and prevailing custom of the mind joining them thus together in thinking.'*

This practice of dogmatical inculcation in the case of children, coupled with the moral treatment usually connected with it, is open to all the general objections already stated. It is, especially, any thing but assisting them to discharge the duties and attain the ends of inquiry: it is in reality the reverse; for no one will surely deny, that if their minds are strongly imbued with particular doctrines, if they are taught to believe that to doubt such doctrines is a crime, if they are commanded to receive them as positive and incontrovertible truths of which no question is to be entertained, if they grow up therefore unaccustomed to the effort and unacquainted with the duty of examination, the effect must be a state of mind as remote as possible from a fearless and ardent desire after truth,

* Conduct of the Understanding, § 41. The same sentiments are expressed in one of Locke's letters to his friend Molyneux. 'Pray let this be your chief care, to fill your son's head with clear and distinct ideas, and teach him on all occasions, both by practice and rule, how to get them, and the necessity of it. This, together with a mind active and set upon the attaining of reputation and truth, is the true principling of a young man. But to give him a reverence for our opinions, because we taught them, is not to make knowing men, but prattling parrots.' — *Works*, vol. viii. p. 378.

and a conduct in regard to investigation in which we shall vainly look for diligence and impartiality.

It may be urged, indeed, that instilling doctrines into the minds of children is to a certain extent unavoidable; that at least they must necessarily learn many things the reasons of which they cannot understand, and take many conclusions on trust because incapable of appreciating the evidence on which they rest. All this is readily allowed. In the course of tuition it may be requisite to lay before them many propositions for which they can for a while have no other warrant than the authority of the teacher; but if we really wish to produce in them a love of truth, a desire after knowledge, a spirit of candor, and that integrity of mind which will best preserve them from error, nothing must be taught them as a doctrine which it is incumbent upon them to believe, and of which it is a crime to doubt. On the contrary, they should be impressed, as early as practicable, with the duty of fair inquiry. All the instruction given them should be accompanied with inducements to exert their own faculties, to seek after reasons for what is asserted. They should be rescued from the mere passive adoption of what is proposed to them by authority, and trained to the habit of drawing their own inferences. Even when the proof is beyond their comprehension, they should be made to understand that it is only postponed. All the reverence which they are commonly educated to entertain for particular doctrines and names, they should be taught to feel for truth itself, and for honesty of investigation. It is under such a discipline that we should expect to see minds of wisdom and integrity arise which would be blessings to the world.

The sentiments here expressed might be enforced by citations from the works of several distinguished writers of

very opposite schools, but I must content myself with a passage from the pages of a late elegant author: — 'I would not,' he says, 'have it be thought that because I plead for freedom of inquiry, I would, therefore, leave youth without the guide of reason and experience. Polybius has defined man to be an animal that forms opinions: as soon, then, as a man begins to show that he possesses the characterizing quality of his species, the formation of his opinions ought to be considered as the most essential part of his education. Now, this should not be attempted by dogmatical precepts and positive laws; but by persuasion, argument, and example; by assiduously inculcating the principle which ought to prevail; and by endeavoring to render the reason clear why it should be adopted. Opinions which are communicated upon one side without the authority of reason, and which are received upon the other without the labor of investigation, are seldom honorable either to him who teaches or to him who learns.' *

From the numerous examples of the systematic instillation of prejudice furnished by the history of mankind, two may be here cited by way of illustration.

The late Emperor of France pushed the authoritative inculcation of doctrines to an extreme, which by its absurdity, exposed the real nature of the proceeding to the dullest observation.

By means of the national catechism ordered by him to be taught in the schools of France, the lesson was carefully instilled into the minds of the young, that all those who failed in their duty to himself, resisted the order of things established by God, and rendered themselves deserving of eternal damnation.†

* Academical Questions, by Sir W. Drummond, preface, p. xi.

† Considerations on the French Revolution, by Madame de Staël, part iv. chap. 6.

The other illustration is furnished by the practice of Mahometans. Their children are sedulously impressed with dogmatical confidence in the tenets of the Koran, without the slightest attempt on the part of their teachers to exhibit any evidence or argument, and they are taught to hate with rancor all who differ from their theological creed; the consequences of which are, a total repugnance to improvement, a stultification of intellect, a deprivation of morals, and a spirit of fanaticism and intolerance towards all infidels, especially Christians. 'The parents,' says Lane, speaking of the Egyptians, 'seldom devote much of their time or attention to the education of their children, generally contenting themselves with instilling into their young minds a few principles of religion, and then submitting them, if they can afford to do so, to the instruction of a schoolmaster. As early as possible, the child is taught to say, 'I testify that there is no deity but God, and I testify that Mahomet is God's Apostle.' He receives also lessons of religious pride, and learns to hate the Christians and all other sects but his own, as thoroughly as does the Mooslim in advanced age.' *

From these two examples even the most prejudiced minds may be led to suspect that there is something fundamentally wrong in the practice of one-sided instruction and authoritative instillation. When the dogmas inculcated are different from their own, they will scarcely deny the evil effects of a system which, if consistently pursued, would do much to arrest the progress of mankind in knowledge, noble-mindedness, and civilization.

* Account of the Modern Egyptians, vol. i. p. 63.

SECTION IV.

PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS.

There still remains for consideration one important mode in which a man can exercise an influence over the minds of others in relation to the pursuit of truth, in which he can render them essential assistance in the attainment of the great object of inquiry. By the publication of his opinions and of the reasons on which they are founded, he acts at once on the understandings of a multitude. Private communication and personal explanations, such as we have hitherto had principally in view, have comparatively a narrow sphere for their evil or their good; but the instruction which is offered to mankind at large, has only the limits of the world for the ultimate boundary of its influence.

In the present day, amongst all the various means of diffusing information, publication through the press is incomparably the most effective in assisting the cause of truth, and for the purposes of the present discussion may be taken as the representative of the rest. 'Through the diffusion of education and printing (to borrow the words of an eloquent writer), a private man may now speak to multitudes, incomparably more numerous than ancient or modern eloquence ever electrified in the popular assembly, or the hall of legislation. By these instruments truth is asserting her sovereignty over nations without the help of rank, office, or sword; and her faithful ministers will become more and more the lawgivers of the world.'*

What are the circumstances which imperatively call upon a man to assist the cause of truth in this way, it

* Character of Napoleon, by Dr. Channing, part ii.

may not always be easy to determine. All nevertheless will acknowledge, that the welfare of mankind would be wofully injured, if every individual, however gifted by nature, or accomplished by study, were to confine his instructions to the circle of his family and his friends, or restrict his efforts to mere personal communication. The progress of society in every thing good and great depends on the promulgation and public interchange of knowledge, and the more thoroughly this is effected the better.

Here, then, is an obligation upon all who are capable of benefiting society in this manner. On whom the duty is incumbent is indeed a point unavoidably left to be determined by the conscience and self-appreciation, and, it may be added, at the peril of the individual.

It may be said in general terms, that every one who has taken due pains to master a subject, who feels persuaded that he can present it in a new light, and who is not destitute of the obvious qualifications for the task, lies under an obligation to communicate his knowledge to his fellow-creatures, provided they are in a sufficiently civilized and virtuous condition to receive it without destroying the happiness or the existence of their instructor. Not to do it, if the matter were of importance, would be reprehensible selfishness; it could be only to avoid trouble, or shrink from responsibility, or maintain a solitary superiority over the rest of the world.

It is true, he may be deceived in his estimate of his own achievements; an exaggerated opinion of the value of what we ourselves accomplish, is perhaps inseparable from human nature; but if he has taken due pains, and is actuated by a proper spirit, his conduct is on every principle entitled to unmixed approbation. It may happen too, that, by communicating the result of his inquiries, he may be instrumental in promulgating error; his views

may wander widely from the truth, and he may lead many astray by the same misconceived facts or illusive reasonings which have deceived his own mind. These are things which, according to the constitution of man and the present state of society, cannot be avoided. Even in this case, nevertheless, he is doing good. His errors are in all probability such as have, with more or less distinctness, presented themselves to other minds as well as his, in the character of truths. To bring them openly forward, with the premises from which they are deduced and the train of reasoning by which they have established themselves as truths in his own understanding, is giving them the best chance of being refuted, and refuted in so full and luminous a manner, that their real character will be conspicuous to every future inquirer.

Had they been kept back by indolence or timidity, had they and the arguments in their support not been openly produced and examined, they would have continued to haunt other minds as well as his, to delude other thinkers besides himself, and create those casual and vague disputes, which are perpetually arising when a question has not been thoroughly canvassed.*

When the circumstances here described have made it a man's duty to communicate his opinions to the public, the manner of doing it can admit of little controversy. He is quite as much bound in this case to honesty of statement and fairness of proceeding, as when he is giving private instruction. The object to be kept in view is to assist the progress and prevalence of truth, which it is almost tautology to say cannot be promoted by either concealment or exaggeration of evidence, by the coloring of facts or the sophistication of reasoning. While he who

* See Appendix, note B.

with upright intentions and after adequate examination is unfortunate enough to be the instrument of disseminating error, merits our esteem, no reprehension can be too severe for the conscious promulgator of false assertions and fallacious arguments.*

From the fallibility of which even the most sedulous and honest inquirer partakes, it also behooves every one who publishes his opinions to the world to suspect the possibility at least of his being in the wrong, and to refrain from arrogantly assuming on his own part that exemption from error which he will not grant to another. Above all, he should avoid the offensive practice of affecting superior moral excellence in virtue of the doctrines he maintains, and casting odium upon others because they differ from him. He should keep aloof from what has been well designated as 'that dogmatical assumption of the upper ground in controversy, which entrenches itself in supposed rights and prerogatives; treats as a violation of decorum the free use of language in its opponents; and even while it condescends to employ arguments, seasons them with arrogant and uncharitable reflections on the motives and intentions of the adversary.' †

The substantial duty, in a word, of the man who makes known his researches or speculations to the world, is to take

* 'Is it,' asks Mr. Stewart, 'more criminal to misrepresent a fact than to impose on the world by what we know to be an unsound or a fallacious argument?' 'Is it in a moral view more criminal, or is it more inconsistent with the dignity of a man of true honor, to defraud men in a private transaction by an incorrect or erroneous statement of circumstances, than to mislead the public to their own ruin by those wilful deviations from truth into which we see men daily led by views of interest or ambition, or by the spirit of political faction?' — *Philosophy of the Active and Moral Powers*, vol. ii. p. 338.

† Aikin's Letters to his Son, vol. ii. p. 95.

the trouble of due preparation, to be honest in his communications, and to arrogate nothing to himself as an inquirer which he will not grant to others exercising the same function. Instead of demanding from them the deference due to an indisputable oracle from whose declarations it is criminal to dissent, he should point out, whenever the occasion requires it, the urgent duty, and animate them with the manly spirit of impartial investigation; and warn them against receiving on authority any conclusions the evidence for which is open to their own scrutiny.

SECTION V.

THE RECEPTION OF PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS.

In the department of morality now under consideration, as in others, duties are reciprocal. If in certain circumstances an inquirer is called upon to communicate his views of any question to the public, the public, or those who are to derive the benefit of the communication, have also their part to perform, and by the right or wrong performance of it the cause of truth and human happiness is materially promoted or injured. On the principles already maintained, these views ought to receive from every one who makes them objects of attention, and especially from every one who takes upon himself to pass judgment upon their merits, that full and fair examination of which we have so often spoken.

We have seen in a former chapter that every individual is bound to make a diligent and impartial inquiry into those questions the determination of which is necessary to his conduct in life, private or public, professional or unofficial; inasmuch as the fortune, reputation, health, and existence of his fellow-creatures are often dependent on the discharge of the duty.

Under this law every one places himself, who assumes the function of publicly pronouncing on the merits and demerits of works in literature, philosophy, and science. The peace of mind, the reputation, the social position, and even the property of the author, as well as the good of the public, may all be materially affected by the judgment delivered. The self-constituted judge, then, can be in a fit condition to pronounce sentence only when he has made himself master of the cause.

This sentence, it is almost needless to say, should be as just an appreciation of the work as a proper examination can arrive at. While some degree of good-will and approbation is due, as already shown, to every communication made to the public with upright intentions and diligent preparation, this can form no reason for withholding a strict appreciation of merits and defects.

A man who presents his views to the world is attempting to influence the minds of myriads of human beings, and it becomes of importance that these views should be put to the severest test which human ingenuity can devise. Since it is for the benefit of all that truth should prevail, the merits and defects, the strength and weakness of a work, whatever they really are, should be rendered distinctly manifest. As no upright man would wish error to exist for his own private advantage in opposition to the general good, so he ought not to refrain from the exposure of it in the writings of others, merely from a principle of humanity. If the error is important, the duty of the occasion is to point it out. True benevolence here consists in counteracting a general evil, although at the expense of impairing individual happiness.

The whole duty on the subject, indeed, may be comprised in one word — justice. This is what every one who takes upon himself to pronounce sentence ought to

give, and more than this no man ought even to wish to receive. The general presumption in favor of an author's intentions, in the absence of all evidence to the contrary, should obtain for him the courtesy due to a laudable attempt, should secure him from all imputations of bad motives, but not shield his speculations from scrutiny. Mistaken in some respects as the wisest and best men of every age have been, there is nothing incompatible between thorough esteem for the moral and even intellectual qualities of his mind, and a full conviction of the inaccuracy of his views and the unsoundness of his arguments — nothing inconsistent between respect for the one and a free exposure of the other.

It will frequently happen, that not only errors will be committed, which it will be requisite to expose, but various mental qualities will be exhibited in the communication of opinions — vanity, conceit, affectation, prejudice, presumption, and other offensive and ludicrous characteristics. There is no reason, when any good is to be accomplished by it, why these should not be set in their true light. At the same time it deserves to be remembered, that some errors carry along with them their own refutation, and some weaknesses furnish their own exposure, so that neglect may be a not less efficacious, although a less painful remedy than censure.

The same justice which requires these errors and weaknesses to be shown in their true character, imposes on us the pleasanter duty of pointing out excellences whenever they occur. To commend just reasoning, felicitous illustration, candor, fairness, modesty, and magnanimity, is equally demanded of us, as to expose and condemn qualities of an opposite nature. Critics do not always feel that it is not sufficient to pass over these meritorious qualities in silence — to intermit their vituperation when they meet

with them: something more than this is required by the general good: just commendation is as useful as just censure, and to withhold it is a fraud at once on the individual and the public.

This is the more necessary to be insisted on, as we frequently meet with men, rigid in the application of principles, professing to bring every thing to the standard of utility, and severe in their condemnation of all deviations from this rule, who appear to think they have done every thing required of them when they have performed the task of reprehension. With a strong sense of vice and error, they have no ardor for excellence; prone to censure, they are without inclination to praise; alive to deformity, they are insensible to beauty and elegance. If they attempt to commend, it seems an effort against their nature, which dies away in imperfect accents of abortive eulogy.

Conduct of this kind is reprehensible on their own principles. It is equally important that excellences should be duly appreciated, as that defects should be placed in a true light. In this, as in other cases, we can have no better guide than the law of truth. Let every thing be regarded and represented exactly as it is; let vices be seen as vices, and let virtues appear in their true character. If men see clearly, they can scarcely fail, sooner or later, to feel correctly.

True merit requires no exaggerated praise. The simplest statement of what has been accomplished is all to which it needs to aspire, although it is not all which a generous spirit is impatient to bestow. Nobleness of mind springs forward with ardor to meet every indication of a similar nature wherever it appears. There is no surer mark of the absence of the highest moral and intellectual qualities, than a cold and captious reception of excellence.

Further, it will not escape the candid mind, that being

ourselves liable to mistake, we may err both in censure and applause. Were we infallible, we might with equal fearlessness commit ourselves to a description of both the merits and the defects of any production offered to our scrutiny; but prone to err, we should recollect that errors of censure are not only more certainly destructive of happiness than errors of praise, but tend to repress the most valuable exertions, and we therefore ought to be especially vigilant in investigating the grounds of our decision before we pronounce an unfavorable sentence.

It is interesting to glance at the consequences which have sometimes ensued from an illiberal and unjust reception of the communications made to the world from some of its master spirits. If we look into the history of science and civilization, we shall find that such treatment has had a strong depressing influence on the most distinguished philosophers. Copernicus was long withheld from communicating his discoveries by an apprehension of the reception they would meet with. Harvey was deterred from giving more of his writings to the world by the hostility manifested against those which he had already published. The second part of 'Cudworth's Intellectual System' was never brought forward (according to Warburton), on account of the world's malignity in judging of the first. Jenner was haunted by the fear that his great discovery would be made the subject of ridicule; and long after it had been divulged, the animadversions cast upon it led him to declare that he would think no more for the public good, since nothing but abuse was got for it.*

Even Sir Isaac Newton himself was the subject of severe attacks, which at one time seem almost to have disgusted him with his favorite pursuits. In a letter to

* Life of Jenner, by Dr. Barron.

Oldenburgh (1672) he writes, 'I intend to be no further solicitous about matters of philosophy; and, therefore, I hope you will not take it ill, if you find me never doing any thing more in that kind.' In another letter (1675) he states that he had had some thoughts of writing a further discourse about colors, but found it yet *against the grain* to put pen to paper any more on that subject. And in a letter to Leibnitz the same year he observes, 'I was so persecuted with discussions, arising from the publication of my theory of light, that I blamed my own imprudence for parting with so substantial a blessing as my quiet to run after a shadow.'*

These few instances, which might be easily multiplied, suffice to show that a real discouragement is offered to the finest minds by an unjust and ungenerous reception of their labors; and it cannot be doubted that the experience or the apprehension of such treatment, by stifling many brilliant thoughts, comprehensive speculations, and useful discoveries, has kept down the dignity and happiness of mankind below the point to which they might have attained. But although genius had never yielded a step to such injustice; although by such means no profound train of thinking had been suppressed, no happy conception imprisoned in its birth-place, no discovery nipped in the bud, yet assuredly every right feeling demands that the happiness of these benefactors of society should at least be protected from wanton injury. If we cannot find in our hearts to reward their merit, let us at all events abstain from thoughtlessly robbing them of their peace. This is, indeed, no more than our own palpable interest dictates. Even in the present day, it is impossible to tell how much we all daily lose by the reserve of wise and thoughtful

* Life of Sir Isaac Newton, by Sir David Brewster, p. 56.

men, in keeping back the fruits of long-continued research and meditation, from an apprehension that the prejudices of society and the rancour of criticism might invade that tranquillity of mind, for the loss of which no reputation could compensate.

But it is not only tranquillity of mind of which they have to apprehend the loss. Criticism frequently tells with forcible effect on a man's position in society, and even on his property. We are informed that the deservedly eminent Dr. Thomas Young had the offer of 1000*l.* for the copyright of his lectures, but on account of the ridicule thrown by the Edinburgh Review on some of his papers in the Philosophical Transactions, the publisher requested to be released from his bargain.*

A late author† of no mean abilities relates that, after the appearance of a hostile criticism in the Quarterly Review on his Characters of Shakspeare's Plays, his publishers scarcely sold another copy, although before that time the sale had been considerable.‡

It is not necessary to examine for the purpose in hand whether, in these instances, the criticism was just. They abundantly prove that public censure can affect the property and social prospects of authors; and that, therefore, on the common principles of the coarsest honesty — of that which respects no injury not reducible into pounds, shillings and pence — censure ought never to be cast upon any one unless it has been maturely considered, and is fully believed to be just. And even such censure may have the effect of injustice if it is not accompanied by a candid statement of all that is worthy of praise.

On the other hand, it must be admittted to be similarly

* Lockhart's Life of Sir Walter Scott, vol. ii. p. 18.

† Hazlitt.

‡ Hazlitt's Table Talk, p. 229.

inconsistent with integrity to pronounce extravagant encomiums, bestowed insincerely, or hazarded without proper examination. When hazarded in this way, they are frequently the instruments of fraud and disappointment, leading the reader to throw away his money and his time on worthless books, such as he would have rejected had their real character been known to him. They thus virtually rob one man for the benefit of another, while they assist in depraving the public taste, and misdirecting the public judgment.

The laxity which prevails on these points in the present day would raise our wonder if it were not in keeping with the moral tone pervading society. A remarkable instance of it may be found in no less a person than Sir Walter Scott, a noble-hearted man in general, but who in his capacity of reviewer, performed acts not to be vindicated unless the principles here maintained can be disproved.

Writing to a correspondent, he says, 'I have run up an attempt on the Curse of Kehama for the Quarterly.' · · ·

'What I could, I did — which was to throw as much weight as possible upon the beautiful passages, of which there are many, and to slur over the absurdities, of which there are not a few.' · · · ·

'*I would have made a very different hand of it, indeed, had the order of the day been* pour déchirer.'*

Here is a plain avowal, that, acting as umpire between the author and the public, he was influenced by private motives, unconnected with the merits of the book, to pronounce an award which would have been very different in its character had those private motives been different, while the merits of the book remained precisely the same. And this is the declaration of a man of highly

* Lockhart's Life of Scott, vol. ii. p. 302.

honorable principles, who was fully alive to many of the transgressions of public criticism. What would he have thought of similar conduct in a judge on the bench? and yet there is no real difference between one case and the other.

The view which has now been taken of the proper mode of receiving public communications would be incomplete, if it were closed without adverting to the importance, in such cases, of the right application of *moral* approbation and censure. Although this has already been insisted upon in respect to private intercourse, and what was then said will apply *mutatis mutandis* here, yet it will not be superfluous to repeat, in connection with our present subject, that these sentiments should be directed, not to doctrines, but to actions, not to the results of inquiry, but to the conduct exhibited in the prosecution of it; that error should not be treated as crime; that all attempts on the part of any one to excite odium against others for differences of thought should be unsparingly reprobated; that the assumption of intellectual, and especially of moral superiority by a writer, over all who disagree with him in opinion, on the mere ground of that disagreement, should be uniformly scouted; that honesty of investigation and fairness of statement should be greeted with eager and hearty commendation, and that the love of truth should be hailed as the brightest distinction of the inquirer.

Were the principles maintained in this cursory glance at the subject consistently acted upon, every man would have the proper inducement to keep back or to bring forward the fruits of his researches, and to bring them forward in a proper manner. Knowing that if he produced what was immature, ridiculous, unsound, or fallacious, he must undergo the ordeal of free exposure, he would be cautious of obtruding what would do him no

honor: confident, on the other hand, that his merits would be fairly appreciated, he would feel all that alertness in his labors which naturally arises from the conviction that we are making advances to a determinate point: and assured that the decision of his judges would in all probability be right, he would acquiesce in it, even if unfavorable, without irritation, and without complaint, and with the satisfaction, at least, that he had made some progress in a knowledge of his own capabilities. Above all, he would be encouraged in the pursuit of truth by the prospect that his efforts would be of service; that any communication he might make to his fellow-creatures in a right spirit could do them no harm, and might confer lasting benefit; and that he might venture on attempting to enlighten them without any risk of being overwhelmed with obloquy or violence because he had succeeded.

SECTION VI.

DUTIES OF NON-INQUIRERS.

In the preceding sections the argument in its general scope assumes that the parties whose conduct is in question are themselves inquirers, and having performed the task of investigation incumbent upon them, are in a condition to advise or assist others in doing the same. But as we have before stated, there is another class of persons to be taken into view, who not having gone through the process of inquiry, or having gone through it in an extremely superficial and inadequate manner, may for brevity be denominated non-inquirers.

If men of this class did not interfere with their fellow-creatures in regard to matters of research and opinion, their social conduct would not properly come under our present notice; but inasmuch as they do very commonly

interfere in regard to such matters, the discussion of the subject would be incomplete if no attempt were made to point out the line of conduct which they ought to pursue, as well as that which they ought to avoid, in so far as their circumstances are peculiar, and do not fall under the rules already prescribed.

It is not material in this view whether individuals are non-inquirers by their own fault or from the necessity of their condition. The point now to consider, is their conduct not in relation to the pursuit of truth, but in relation to other human beings who are or may be engaged in it. The social duties in question, of persons who from whatever cause belong to the class of non-inquirers are, principally, in the nature of the case, of a negative character. Not having possessed themselves of the knowledge which investigation only can supply, such individuals are in no condition to furnish intellectual assistance to others, and have little power even to give effectual counsel and encouragement to their fellow-creatures who are or ought to be occupied in the pursuit of truth. As far as they can do either, they ought to be guided by the principles already explained. An ignorant but right-minded person may be instrumental at least in promoting inquiries which he himself from various causes is debarred from prosecuting.

But the main obligation of the non-inquirer is to refrain from that mischievous interference to which he is almost instinctively prone. As he will not or cannot assist the great cause of truth in his own person, he should carefully abstain from doing it the least injury. In this and many other affairs of vital moment, the officious meddling of those who are perfectly powerless to do good has been an immense source of human misery.

The sort of mischievous interference into which the

non-inquirer is prompt to fall, is the indulgence of hatred and malignity against other people because they hold different opinions from his own, sometimes by acts of personal injury and annoyance, and sometimes by open invective or secret calumny. Where the former cannot be ventured upon, the latter is the easy and invariable resort. The practice of what has been expressively termed 'casting odium' upon others for differences of opinion, lamentably prevails in all the self-styled civilized countries of the world, and generally in proportion to the ignorance of the people amongst whom it is found.

Now, without insisting on what has been advanced in a previous section respecting the proper limitation of praise and blame to the conduct exhibited in the pursuit of truth; without even expecting the non-inquirer to comprehend accurately the requisite distinctions, we think his own position is sufficient to show him the gross erroneousness and absurdity of the conduct in question, especially when exercised towards those who have really devoted their attention to a doctrine which he confessedly has not investigated. He differs from them in opinion on a subject which they have examined and he has not: they have taken pains to understand it, he has taken none: they have gained information, of which, as it can be attained only by examination, he is necessarily devoid. Yet in this situation, upon the mere ground of holding an opinion taught him by others, and of the truth of which he is incapable of judging for himself, without ability to weigh the reasons, nay, without even knowing the reasons in support either of his own or the opposite opinion, he suffers his heart to be filled with rancor, and lifts up his voice or his arm against the men who have taken the only rational course for arriving at the truth.

Such is the real conduct of the majority of human

beings, prejudiced non-inquirers, to those who have sedulously discharged the duty of examination, whenever the result of such examination happens to be an opinion different from that which generally prevails. And that it must in the far larger number of cases be different, is sufficiently plain. It would be absurd to suppose, that an inquirer who had devoted all the powers of his mind to the investigation of a subject should have the same views regarding it as the uninquiring crowd. Even if their respective opinions should teach in some points, and be on these points susceptible of being clothed in the same expressions, yet the real conceptions, and especially the related and collateral ideas excited by the words, would be different in the extreme. The intelligent and the ignorant cannot be said (except in a gross and inaccurate sense) to hold the same opinion on any complicated and difficult subject.

After this explanation, the non-inquirer who has attended to it, cannot fail to see, that when he reproaches or persecutes others who *have* inquired, on account of any differences of opinion, he is in reality inflicting punishment upon them for the necessary result of discharging an important obligation, or, when the inquiry is not obligatory, for the issue of a beneficial or laudable undertaking. He is consequently committing a great and disgraceful wrong. His imperative duty is to abstain from intermeddling in a matter in which he is disqualified from taking any useful part. As he can do no good, let him scrupulously avoid the absurdity and injustice of casting the slightest shade of odium on his fellow-creatures on account of any such intellectual differences.

Although the preceding remarks apply expressly to the great majority of mankind, who are, for the most part, precluded from regular and methodical inquiry by their

position, yet they are by no means limitable to that class. It is not to be denied that, in relation to a great number of subjects, the polished and the educated are nearly, if not altogether, on a level with the multitude. They regard themselves as intelligent and enlightened, and, to a certain extent, they are truly so; but general intelligence gives them little or no insight into questions which they have not expressly and minutely examined; and in respect of all such questions they can be ranked only in the class of non-inquirers. Upon them, therefore, is incumbent all the self-restraint, all the reserve in passing judgment, all the abstinence from interference which has been inculcated on the class generally. Yet we every day see them erecting themselves into judges of the most complicated questions, on which their opinions can be nothing more than mere prejudices, and lavishing condemnation and odium upon all who dissent from their dogmas. It cannot be dissembled, and ought not to be suppressed, that this remark is largely applicable to the gentler and more amiable sex, who, seldom calculated by position and education to enter into difficult subjects, and at the same time peculiarly susceptible of strong prepossessions, too often indulge in acrimonious feelings and language against opinions which they cannot possibly have examined with such rigorous attention as could alone justify any one in pronouncing judgment. Even an intellectual condemnation is, under these circumstances, beyond their jurisdiction: but when they proceed also to deal out their moral censure, they exhibit a spectacle at which their best friends must be pained — a spectacle of vain presumption and substantial injustice.

No doubt every human being, man or woman may innocently entertain, nay, must unavoidably entertain, many unexamined opinions, and so long as they are expressed

without the manifestation of any spirit towards other people which would be felt as unjust and intolerable in return, no social wrong is committed; but a great social wrong is committed when, in these cases, the uninformed assume the right of moral condemnation, which, on any supposition, can belong only to the thoroughly instructed, but which, in fact, belongs to none.

Were we even to suppose for a moment that differences of opinion could possibly, in any circumstances, constitute proper grounds for praise and blame, rewards and punishments, yet it is obvious that no one would, in this case, be entitled to pronounce sentence who had not himself faithfully discharged the great duty of inquiry. Before any one can be in a position to condemn his fellow-creatures for any tenets they may hold, the least which can be required is, that he himself should have fully and impartially investigated, not only every part of the subject on which he differs from them, but also the morality of interference with the opinions of others.

It may be added, that any one who had really done this would have lost all disposition for persecution, or even censure. At the end of his investigation he could not fail to discern that, while the mere circumstance of holding any opinion is an object of neither praise nor blame, and while a high degree of either may be merited by performing or neglecting, or perverting, the great duty of searching for truth, the highest degree of criminality attaches to him who interferes by injurious action or contumelious language with the discharge of that duty on the part of another.

Again, then, let it be urged upon all who feel tempted to elevate themselves into moral judges of intellectual differences, to pause before they assume so dangerous a function; to scrutinize their own attainments; to examine

whether they are competent from education and study, and express investigation of the doctrine before them, to pronounce upon its validity; and even when they are competent to do this, whether they are justified in the moral condemnation of any human being for differing in opinion from fellow-creatures as fallible as himself.

CHAPTER VI.

DUTIES OF GOVERNMENTS IN RELATION TO THE PURSUIT OF TRUTH.

HAVING examined what are the duties of human beings individually in entering upon and prosecuting inquiry, and assisting each other in the pursuit of truth, we shall be at no loss to determine the duties of governments, and to appreciate the influence of those political institutions, and practices of mankind in their collective capacity, which have relation to the same department of morals.

In respect to the subject before us, governments are obviously to be considered under the same aspects as individuals. They may be regarded, in the first place, as inquirers themselves; and, in the second place, as having to conduct themselves with uprightness and propriety towards other inquirers, — as having to exercise over the people subject to their control that moral and intellectual influence of which a former chapter has treated.

SECTION I.

DUTIES OF GOVERNMENTS CONSIDERED AS INQUIRERS THEMSELVES.

As an inquirer itself, a government has manifestly a most important part to perform. In the discharge of the judicial office, for which all the business of legislation is merely preparatory, and in legislation itself, the most dili-

gent and faithful investigations are continually demanded.* But besides inquiries of this and analogous kinds, which constitute the very essence of governing, other legitimate fields of research are open to the state, and cannot be neglected with due attention to the public welfare. By the application of its resources it may bring to light much useful knowledge that would be otherwise inaccessible. It may institute inquiries and researches for which the means of individuals are utterly inadequate. In this way we have seen expeditions sent out for astronomical and geographical observation, for surveying regions, coasts and harbors, thus rendering our knowledge of the globe more extensive and accurate, and navigation safe and certain. We have also seen commissions of inquiry appointed to investigate public institutions, social customs, moral and physical influences, and modes of life, which no private exertions would have been competent to examine and appreciate with sufficient fulness and accuracy.†

* This has been well put by the present distinguished head of the French ministry. 'La société existe : il y a quelque chose à faire, n'importe quoi, dans son intérêt, en son nom ; il y a une loi à rendre, une mesure à prendre, un jugement à prononcer. A coup sûr, il y a aussi une bonne manière de suffire à ces besoins sociaux; il y a une bonne loi à faire, un bon parti à prendre, un bon jugement à prononcer. De quelque chose qu'il s'agisse, quelque soit l'intérêt mis en question, il y a en toute occasion une vérité qu'il faut connaître, et qui doit décider de la conduite. La première affaire du gouvernement, c'est de chercher cette vérité, de découvrir ce qui est juste, raisonnable, ce qui convient à la société.' — *Cours d'Histoire Moderne, par* M. Guizot, 5e Leçon.

† 'Still the agency of government in regard to knowledge is necessarily superficial and narrow. The great sources of intellectual power and progress to a people are its strong and original thinkers, be they found where they may. Government cannot and does not extend the bounds of knowledge; cannot make experiments in the laboratory, explore the laws of animal or vegetable nature, or estab-

Hence it is plain that in certain circumstances a government may be morally bound to enter upon inquiries in the same way as an individual; and it is equally plain that in pursuing its investigations, it is under the same obligation as any other inquirer to fulness and fairness of research. All that has been said as to the duties of the individual is applicable, with little modification, to the case of government; and to repeat it here would consequently be a needless fatigue to the reader.

SECTION II.

DUTIES OF GOVERNMENTS TOWARDS THEIR SUBJECTS CONSIDERED AS INQUIRERS. — ENCOURAGEMENT OF INQUIRY.

A government is, secondly, to be viewed in its relations and conduct to other inquirers: it is to be considered as to its power of exercising over its subjects a moral and intellectual influence in reference to the pursuit of truth; of supplying both motives and means for inquiry to the people; of rendering them counsel and assistance in the business of investigation. Here, too, the same principles are applicable as in the case of individuals, although the duties may not be exactly correspondent or co-extensive, and the attending circumstances may be more complicated.

If the state interfere at all in this matter, it should plainly exert its moral and intellectual influence for pro-

lish the principles of criticism, morals, and religion. The energy which is to carry forward the intellect of a people belongs chiefly to private individuals, who devote themselves to lonely thought, who worship truth, who originate the views demanded by their age, who help us to throw off the yoke of established prejudices, who improve on old modes of education, or invent better.' — *Character of Napoleon, by* Dr. CHANNING, part ii.

moting the ends already described: that is to say, for the twofold purpose of inducing and assisting its subjects to discharge the duty of inquiry, and of enabling them to attain the only legitimate object of inquiry — truth. In strict adherence to these objects, it should create no partialities and antipathies to any particular doctrines; it should hold out no inducements to imperfect and unfair examination; it should have recourse to nothing like authoritative inculcation; it should attempt no suppression or concealment of evidence; it should leave conclusions or opinions unpatronized and unpunished, and extend its encouragement to nothing but enterprise in undertaking, and diligence and fairness in conducting, investigation.

These are the right and appropriate principles on which it should act, the legitimate boundaries in which it should confine itself. In so far as any act, or law, or institution, intrudes beyond these limits, its effects on the cause of truth and virtue are injurious. If complete and accurate knowledge is important to mankind, if full and unfettered research is the way to gain possession of it, if exemption from prejudice and a simple wish to attain correct conclusions form the proper state of mind for entering upon any subject, and diligent and impartial attention to the conflicting evidence the proper conduct to be pursued during the examination, then every political regulation or institution which circumscribes inquiry, which creates other wishes, and offers inducements to pursue a different conduct, carries with it its own condemnation. Reprehensible in an individual, this course is at least equally so in the state. By such proceedings, society in fact depraves and injures its own members.

Let us then examine the power and the policy of governments by this test. Let us see how far they are able to promote the great objects to be kept in view, and how

far the course of interference generally adopted in modern communities assists and encourages the people in attaining the desirable ends here set forth, or on the other hand impedes and perverts their efforts.

Of the two objects to be regarded, as already pointed out, when one party interferes by moral influence and intellectual assistance with another in the business of investigation, the first can scarcely be contemplated by any one as coming within the province of the supreme authority.

There seems to be no practicable way of encouraging and fostering by authority the virtue of diligent faithfulness in undertaking and prosecuting such inquiries as are personally incumbent on the individual members of the community, either by rewards on the one hand, or by punishment for neglect of the duty on the other. The requisite evidence in these cases is altogether of too subtle and impalpable a nature to be reached or appreciated by the state. The duty in question, like many others, is one in the discharge of which a government can give no direct assistance, and the attempt to do it could only lead to waste of means and misapplication of time. The virtue to be exercised is too delicate for the coarse hand of power to touch.

If this is a correct representation, if the promotion of this virtue, like many other desirable ends, lies without the province of authority, the whole duty of government in the matter is to take especial care not to injure the cause which it is powerless to assist. As it can lend no positive aid, the important point left for it to attend to is scrupulously to refrain from discouraging or repelling or seducing its subjects from the discharge of those duties of inquiry, which as individuals they are bound to perform. Incapable of interfering so as to promote, it must not interfere to pervert the motives and efforts of the inquirer.

Although this is one of the great principles by which public measures and institutions are to be tried, it seems never to have been distinctly recognized or understood. The just and indispensable abstinence from intermeddling inculcated by it, has consequently never been uniformly and consistently practised; and it is a singular feature in the case, that the methods to be immediately examined which governments have frequently adopted with the professed view of aiding the people in the second object, — the attainment of truth, — have had a direct tendency to counteract the accomplishment of the first object, — a faithful discharge of the duty of inquiry. Governments have often, in fact, sought to guide the people to the truth (professedly at least) in some of the most important departments of knowledge, by offering inducements *not* to inquire, or not to inquire in the manner which duty and wisdom alike prescribe.

This will clearly appear in the course of the examination of such methods to which we now proceed.

SECTION III.

CONTINUATION OF THE SUBJECT. — METHODS OF PROMOTING THE ATTAINMENT OF TRUTH.

There are several methods which governments may adopt with the view of enlarging the existing stock of knowledge and diffusing it amongst the people, or, what is the same thing, of assisting them in the attainment of truth.

One method is to engage learned and skilful men to study and to teach certain branches of knowledge, without any attempt to prescribe the particular doctrines or conclusions which shall be inculcated.

A second method is to engage such men to teach, but at the same time to define beforehand, the specific doctrines which shall be taught.

A third method, frequently but not necessarily combined with the second, is to repress by force all doctrines at variance with such as are authoritatively prescribed.

The remaining business of the present chapter is to try these several methods by the principles already laid down.

SUBSECTION I.

EMPLOYING PUBLIC INSTRUCTORS.

With regard to the first of the methods enumerated, it is unnecessary here to discuss its absolute policy; — whether it is better for governments to establish schools and professorships, and to put forth treatises in any department of science, or on the contrary to leave such matters entirely to the play of interests and feelings in the community. Our present business is to examine solely the consistency of the method with the principles which ought to govern the conduct of human beings to each other.

This examination will not detain us long. When the state engages a competent teacher to instruct the people upon a given branch of knowledge without any restriction as to particular conclusions, any imposition of pre-appointed doctrines, it obviously pursues the same just and simple course as the man who candidly lays before his friend whatever he himself knows in relation to any contemplated inquiry.

Such a proceeding may be superfluous and officious, but it can do no harm to the cause of truth; whether politic or impolitic in itself, it does not infringe the princi-

ples here maintained. Endowing professorships of Natural Philosophy may be taken as an example of appointing instructors to teach a subject without prescribing what particular doctrines shall be taught. By such means the people are doubtless assisted to attain important knowledge.

The second method which governments may take for the professed purpose of guiding the people to sound and accurate opinions, is to select certain conclusions or doctrines, and to bestow emolument on individuals for teaching them. It is obvious that here the character of the proceeding is entirely changed. Let us examine it under the two points of view already intimated — 1st, as to its effects on the people as responsible beings having personally to discharge the duty of inquiry; and, 2dly, as to its effects on their success in attaining truth.

As to the first, no one can be at a loss to perceive what must inevitably ensue both to the teacher and to the taught. The functionary who enters the service of a government on such a condition has no choice, during the whole of his career, as to what he shall teach. From the first day to the last of a life which, as it is a life of tuition, ought to be a life of inquiry, he can ostensibly make no deviation from the opinions to which he originally bound himself. He must, throughout, either conform to the prescribed doctrines, or quit his station and give up the emolument arising from it. At the outset he either believes or disbelieves the doctrines. If he believes them, he has cogent motives for abstaining from all examination of their validity; at least from any fair and candid examination of the objections brought against them. The indolence of mind engendered by the perfect coincidence of his opinions and his interest disposes him to shun an intellectual effort, which could not have a happier issue

than the conclusion in which he is already at his ease; and the apprehension of the bare possibility of a different result operates equally to dissuade him from the enterprise. Every consideration presented by the circumstances in which he is placed suggests, that his exertions should be restricted to an inquiry after more striking and ingenious arguments in support of the opinions which he is at present fortunate enough to hold.

If, on the other hand, he does not believe the doctrines which he has undertaken to profess and expound, he will have equally strong reasons to keep him from a full and impartial inquiry into their truth. To escape the degradation of inculcating on others doctrines which he disbelieves himself, he will apply all his attention to the evidence in their favor: all his diligence, his talent, his ingenuity, will be exerted to magnify the arguments that he wishes to find conclusive; all his care will be employed to keep his mind from the operation of antagonist considerations.

A man in either of the situations described can hardly be expected to be possessed with a wish to arrive at the truth, whatever it may be. It is the natural tendency of his position to destroy this wish in the most candid and impartial mind, and to substitute in its place the desire to attain or strengthen a conviction of the prescribed doctrines. The consequences of arriving at results inconsistent with them are too fearful for him to contemplate, and he will therefore venture on no course of study or exertion in which he does not see a probable termination in their favor.

Thus shackled and biassed in his own inquiries, it is easy to perceive what sort of influence he will exert over those persons whom it is his province to instruct. A man who shrinks from full and fair investigation himself, is not

likely to recommend that duty to others, while he is necessarily incapacitated from presenting to them an impartial statement of evidence. Instead then of rendering assistance to his fellow-creatures, in the way pointed out in the last chapter, he will probably resort to dogmatical declamation, and endeavor to deter others by raising conscientious alarms or dealing out moral opprobrium from that fearless pursuit of truth which the temptations and restraints of his position have made impossible to him. In how many other ways soever he may be doing good, he will, in this respect, be employed, perhaps unconsciously and unintentionally, in perverting the minds of his fellow-men; and unless he rise far superior to the noxious influences of the situation in which he has been placed by the state, he will become (with equal unconsciousness) an oppressor and persecutor. Thus, by this system of pre-appointed doctrines, not only the national instructors, but through them the community at large, will be prevented or deterred from fulfilling the duty of fair and adequate investigation; diligence and honesty in the pursuit of truth will be discouraged, and a spirit of intolerance engendered and maintained.

It may be remarked in passing that the effects here described do not, manifestly, arise from the circumstance of the benefit being held out by the state, nor from its being mainly of a pecuniary nature, nor from the particular department of knowledge to which the doctrines belong. The annexation of any advantage of whatever character, whether by positive institution or by the habits of the community to any particular opinions, be the subject what it may, has the same consequences. Eligibility to honors, professional employment, the esteem of friends, reputation in society, popularity with the crowd, and other benefits accruing from the profession of certain opinions

may equally present inducements to negligent and impartial treatment of evidence. The temptation of the advantages beforehand and the apprehension of losing them afterwards, are essentially the same under all these modifications, and operate in a similar way.*

Such institutions and practises have also a further effect besides their direct influence over the minds of the parties as already described. Men, seeing the advantages of holding these doctrines, and some of them feeling perhaps the evils of disbelieving them, are particularly careful to implant them in the minds of their children, that their descendants may fully possess the firm conviction which removes so many obstacles from the career of fame and fortune, and thus the pernicious practice of dogmatical instillation is perpetuated, while the duty of inquiry remains neglected and untaught.

Thus as to the first of the objects which the people have to regard, and which the state, if it interfere at all, ought to encourage and assist them to accomplish; governments, whenever they pursue this method, do nothing to promote but a great deal to counteract it.

Instead of either refraining from interference or adopting a system calculated to impress upon the people the duty of inquiry, to cherish in the community a conscientious regard to impartial investigation, to inspire all classes and especially the national instructors with a love of truth, they offer inducements to unfairness of examination and insincerity of profession.

* The powerful influence of public opinion, independently of positive institution, in seducing and deterring individuals from the fearless and manly pursuit of truth, may be seen plainly enough in our own country, but perhaps on a still larger scale in America, as vividly described by De Tocqueville. Vide Note E. in Appendix, referred to in its proper place under the next Section.

We turn then next to inquire how far this method accomplishes what it professes to undertake — with what success it guides the people to the truth.

In the first place, it must occur to every one, after the discussions already gone through, that the most effectual way of assisting men to attain truth, is to remove all obstacles to inquiry, all seductions to indolent acquiescence or partial attention to evidence, and to lead them to examine thoroughly the grounds of any doctrine which they may be called upon to investigate. Error universally arises from narrow and incomplete views, and is least likely to be found amongst men trained to exercise their faculties without restraint, and to look at a question on all sides. But when governments employ functionaries to teach certain fixed doctrines, they directly and at once circumscribe inquiry as far as in them lies, and thus lessen the probability of attaining truth. The teachers are, as we have already seen, doomed to remain in one unchangeable intellectual condition, to look from only one point of view, to pace within a circle that cannot be enlarged, and as far as their influence extends, they will keep the people in a similar unprogressive state, with an equally bounded power of vision.

Full, rigid, impartial, unfettered examination must ever be the way to advance the progress and dissemination of knowledge of every kind, moral or physical, sacred or profane. Imagine for a moment what would ensue if in all the great departments of knowledge, governments should endeavor to protect and further the interests of truth by laying down a string of propositions on each subject, and hiring professors to inculcate and enforce them. Where under such a system, had it been adopted two or three centuries ago, would have been the brilliant results of chemical experiment? or the wonderful treasures of

knowledge extracted from the earth by geological research? or the sublime discoveries won by the astronomer from the depths of the heavens?

The absurdity of such a course would be more apparent, although not more real, in proportion as the departments of knowledge in which it was adopted, admitted of certainty in their conclusions, and it assuredly would be more harmless. What sentiments would be excited by any government which should positively enjoin on the mathematical professors in its pay, that they should not teach any propositions at variance with those of Euclid? But the real absurdity would be quite as great although not so innocent, if this provident care on the part of government were to extend itself to the patronage of any doctrines which might have been fixed upon by any body of men, however able and eminent, in the disputable and varying sciences of medicine, chemistry, and geology. In the first case, the protection would be idly superfluous; in the second, by raising up a strong interest against further inquiry, it would be pernicious in proportion as it proved effectual, because every science the investigation of which by those who apply themselves to it, has not yet produced unanimity, is either erroneous in its conclusions or imperfect in its development, and a comparison of the discordant opinions arising in different minds from the study of it, is essentially necessary to remove those errors of fact, of reasoning, or of exposition by which unanimity is precluded.

It will scarcely be urged against this representation that the few individuals who are at any time entrusted with the powers of government, have peculiar facilities for arriving at truth. In no department of knowledge except that connected with their office, can this be pretended with the slightest verisimilitude. On the contrary, from the cir-

cumstance of their attention being engrossed by the important and appropriate objects of protecting person and property, and the thousand incidents thence arising, they are in a great measure disqualified for determining truth in other matters. The absorption of the feelings and faculties by one class of interesting subjects, necessarily precludes the highest degree of fitness for judging of others. Such a degree of aptitude for forming a sound judgment on any set of questions, can be the fruit of nothing but particular devotion to them under the indispensable conditions of perfect freedom of examination and exemption from extrinsic bias. But suppose the most favorable case; suppose that the few persons wielding the authority of the state, have not ventured to fix on any doctrines as true, without the aid of the most learned men. These men have been assembled for the purpose, have investigated, have deliberated, have determined, and finally presented the government with a set of conclusions in their judgment indubitably true. These are adopted by the state, and professors are paid for teaching them. Now then, it may be said, the objection that the government itself cannot determine truth, is got quit of: it calls in proper assistance, it brings together the ablest men, and obtains a result if not absolutely without error, yet more accurate than could be obtained in any other way.

It may, indeed, be at once admitted, that at any given moment in any department of knowledge, the conclusions of the ablest men who have made it their peculiar study under perfect freedom of inquiry, and totally uninfluenced by either hopes or fears, are far more likely to be correct than the opinions of the multitude; and that if the doctrines agreed upon by an assembly of such eminent men, perfectly unshackled in their deliberations and unbiassed by professional interests, could be substituted for

the prevalent notions in the minds of the people, the cause of truth would be advanced. But this admission will not avail the defenders of fixed doctrines. Such an assembly has never yet been seen, and to be of the required use must be in perpetual session. Amongst a race of inquisitive but fallible beings, knowledge is necessarily progressive. The opinions of the ablest men, if such men could be assembled in the way described, might be nearer approximations to truth at the moment than those of the people at large, but might possibly be shown to be erroneous or defective in the succeeding age, or even the succeeding year. By fixing, therefore, once for all on such opinions to be taught without deviation, by professors salaried for the purpose, a government not gifted with infallibility, or unable to call in the assistance of men who are, would be unavoidably expending its resources in the maintenance and propagation of error.

As the only way, then, to obviate these consequences, the assembly must, as already intimated, continue in perpetual session, or be reconstructed at short intervals. It must be constantly inquiring; keeping up with the advances of knowledge in other quarters; receiving freely the light directed by other sciences upon that to which its supervision is limited; and modifying accordingly the propositions to be publicly taught.

On this plan, undoubtedly, a great part of the objections applying to the actual system would vanish: but it would only change the character of the difficulties in which a government would be plunged by undertaking to determine and to propagate truth: and as such a project has never been seriously proposed, it is not necessary to dwell on the obvious reasons which render it impracticable.

Nor is any such providential care and contrivance on the part of a government at all necessary or useful. With-

out this cumbrous and costly machinery, under the simple system of non-interference as to results, the ablest men of the age *are* in perpetual session, as truly as they can ever be, canvassing the most difficult questions, devoting themselves to the most arduous researches, and sedulously working their way to truth.

Against this view of the subject, it may perhaps be alleged 'that it proceeds on the supposition that knowledge of all kinds is necessarily progressive, whereas it is plain that true propositions cannot alter: they may have other propositions, true or false, added to them, but they remain unaffected themselves. Now, if such true propositions are adopted by the state, they may be more certainly established in the minds of men, and more extensively disseminated than if they were left to make their own way without protection or patronage.' This argument, however, takes for granted that the whole difficulty — the difficulty of determining truth — has been overcome. No doubt there are propositions, which being perfectly true, are unsusceptible of alteration; but it is obvious, that before they can be adopted by the state, they must be found out and discriminated from such as are false. Besides, they may be true, but fall short of the whole truth; they may form only part of a series of propositions, and convey even a false impression, till the complete series has been brought to light: or they may be true only under certain conditions, liable to alter. Hence the knowledge of the subject to which they relate is progressive from the very nature of the human mind, or of the objects of its cognizance; and the question is, whether or not the discovery of new truths, and the disentangling of known truths from the errors with which they are complicated, are best effected by unfettered investigation, or by the state stepping in at some point in the progress, pro-

nouncing authoritatively that the ultimate goal has been reached, and employing functionaries to teach the doctrines thus decisively fixed, as by an enchanter's wand, in the particular form and attitude which they may have happened to assume at the moment the decree was uttered.

This seems to have been actually attempted in jurisprudence by Justinian, after the promulgation of his celebrated collection. 'He entirely forbade,' says Savigny, 'the rise of a new jurisprudential literature for the future. Only Greek translations of the Latin text, and (by way of mechanical aid) short sketches of the contents of the title, were to be allowed; if any book, properly so called, any commentary on these laws, were written, it was to be destroyed, and the author subjected to the punishment inflicted on forgery.' 'One thought,' he continues, 'lay at the bottom of all these edicts; viz., that this selection from the legal science and wisdom of former ages was adequate to all the wants of society, and could only be impaired by any new work.'*

In the whole of Justinian's proceeding, we may observe the identical course pursued which we have been here contending against. He employed the ablest jurists he could find to extract the necessary and useful matter from the whole mass of existing documents on the subject; he then stereotyped it as the perfection of wisdom, from which all deviation would be an evil; he appears to have provided the schools of law with a new plan of instruction, by which to teach these immutable precepts; and he visited all commentary, all discussion of the justice or policy of his code, with criminal punishment. 'The fun-

* See Fragments from German Authors, translated by Mrs. Austen, p. 169.

damental idea,' adds the writer already quoted, 'which prompted it, is in fact the same self-delusion which, deeply rooted in human nature, is continually recurring in every part of the domain of opinion, and especially in the religious part: *i. e.*, we believe ourselves permitted to impose on others, as exclusively right and authoritative, that particular formula of thought which we have constructed by the honest and conscientious exertion of our own powers, *thus*, as we think, *for ever banishing error.*' *

All such attempts to banish error can serve but to retain it. The only useful office which the prescribed dogmas can perform, will be to stand like so many immovable landmarks indicating to the eyes of future generations how far the tide of human progress has swept beyond the limits imposed by human presumption.

The objections here stated to the system of pre-appointed conclusions have now in most cases their full weight. In no departments of knowledge (with few exceptions) do governments in the present day, having any pretensions to be called free, ever attempt to bind down those persons whom they employ in the capacity of teachers to certain fixed doctrines, whether the latest results of inquiry, or such as were propounded and settled in an age of comparative ignorance.

Such a course could not conduce to the general attainment of truth by the people, but in whatever department

* '*It is the first care of a reformer*,' says Gibbon with grave sarcasm, '*to prevent any future reformation.* To maintain the text of the Pandects, the Institutes, and the Code, the use of cyphers and abbreviations was rigorously proscribed, and as Justinian recollected that the perpetual edict had been buried under the weight of commentators, he denounced the punishment of forgery against the rash civilians who should presume to interpret or pervert the will of their sovereign.' — *Decline and Fall*, chap. xliv.

of knowledge it were adopted, would unavoidably disseminate and perpetuate error.*

But were it even admitted that the doctrines so selected would in all likelihood be true, this system of maintaining and propagating them would still (we must not forget) be open to the insurmountable objection already urged, that it interfered with that personal duty of inquiry, obligatory on individuals, which the state is at all times bound to respect.

It must be recollected that the duty which presents itself to be performed by any one whose situation calls him to inquiry is simply honest and diligent examination, and that to draw him from this course by an offer of advantages even on the side of what the offerer conceives to be truth, is to seduce him from the proper discharge of a task of the highest moral obligation, as well as to place him in an imperfect intellectual condition in relation to the subject. It is impossible to maintain *both* that it is incumbent on a man to conduct an examination impartially, and that it is right in other men, singly or associated, to present inducements which shall influence him to do it partially. Such inducements, it is almost needless to remark, operate precisely in the same way, whether offered by individuals or by the state; and the same principles of morality apply to both alike, and with equal force.

When we reflect, too, that the duty of inquiry is in many cases, and especially in those cases in which governments are apt to interfere, a direct obligation to the Almighty Author of our being, the attempt of any human creature, armed with what authority soever, to discourage or prevent or pervert the performance of that duty, becomes a procedure of even awful presumption. †

* See Appendix, Note C. † See Appendix, Note D.

SUBSECTION II.

EMPLOYING FORCE.

We have next to examine the third method which may be adopted by governments with a view to assist the people in attaining truth; namely, repressing by force all doctrines at variance with such as have been prescribed by authority; in a word, persecution for opinions, that eternal blot on the reputation of humanity, which it is difficult to mention without an indignation inconsistent with a dispassionate survey of its effects.* This must, in a greater or smaller degree, always prevail where emolument or distinction is held out for teaching or attends the profession of prescribed doctrines, inasmuch as the loss of advantages in possession has all the effect of a positive penalty on the parties subject to it.

When we were pointing out in a former part of this treatise the violations of duty in connection with the pursuit of truth observable amongst individuals, the consideration of the particular transgression now before us was postponed (with the view of avoiding repetitions) to the present chapter, as its more appropriate place. As all that can be said of persecution when it is the work of government will apply with little modification to such forms as it commonly assumes in private life, the separate consideration of the latter became needless. Penalties applied to opinions do not, any more than rewards, depend for their effects on the agency through which they are administered; nor is their rigor uniformly greater when imposed by the state. The persecution inflicted by society itself, or by its individual members, is sometimes

* See Appendix, Note D.

equal in atrocity to any which proceeds from the hand of power.*

It may also be here recalled to the reader's attention, that although persecution has been the most frequently and extensively employed in the support of theological doctrines, the same brute violence has been extended to other departments of knowledge. Thus to take an example, which happens to be at hand, from the history of France. In 1624, at the request of the University of Paris, and especially of the Sorbonne, persons were forbidden by an *arrêt* of parliament, 'on pain of death, to hold or teach any maxim contrary to ancient and approved authors, or to enter into any debate but such as should be approved by the doctors of the faculty of theology.' By the same *arrêt* several persons who had composed and published theses against the doctrine of Aristotle, were either reprimanded or banished.†

The fate of the celebrated Ramus, too, in the preceding century, is a well known instance of the virulence of persecution against all who called in question the infallibility of Aristotle. His writings were prohibited and ordered to be burnt, and he himself forbidden to teach.

In examining this method of forcible suppression by the same tests as have been applied to the method of promoting the cause of truth by the employment of teachers, it seems almost ludicrous to enter upon a formal proof that repressing opinions by violence, so far from assisting inquiry, must prevent the people from discharging the duty of a full and impartial investigation into the subject to which such opinions relate. It is, nevertheless, worth while to trace the way in which in relation to the pursuit

* For proofs of this, see Note E. in Appendix.

† See D'Alembert on the Abuse of Criticism in Religion.

of truth, it operates on the mind, conduct, and condition, of a people who are unfortunate enough to be placed in such a state of intellectual slavery.

Forcible suppression not only takes away the opportunity and means of inquiry from the community at large, but destroys or vitiates the natural motives to inquire. There can be no doubt that as rewards encourage a partial attention to evidence in favor of those doctrines for the profession of which they are bestowed, so the opposite treatment — persecution — has, to a large extent, the effect of inducing mankind to shun the persecuted doctrines, and the arguments in their support. The lovers of sympathy who shrink from disapprobation — the worldly who are alive to profit or pleasure but indifferent to truth — the indolent and supine who do not greatly concern themselves about any opinions so long as their ordinary course of life is suffered to run smoothly, are all deterred by a fear of consequences from attending to doctrines which can bring nothing but discredit and danger on their votaries. They are frightened from what is really their imperative duty. With bolder dispositions it is otherwise. When persecution is let loose upon society without being pushed to absolute extermination, the effect upon the strong-minded and energetic is to rouse the spirit of resistance; and this is especially the effect on every one who suffers in his own person. His passions are stimulated against his oppressors, his mind is thrown into the attitude of defiance and contention, and instead of simply seeking for what is true, his whole soul is bent on detecting the errors of his antagonists, and providing himself with every possible argument on his own side. He grasps not at truth, but at the means, whatever they may be, of self-defence, and at the power of annoyance. Provoked to a keen scrutiny, he enters upon it without any adequate

sense of the real obligation under which he lies, and in a state of mind far from being favorable to stern impartiality of investigation.

This is true, even of that minor species of persecution which consists in debarring dissentients from certain rights and privileges, or exacting declarations of faith, or requiring conformity to repulsive ceremonies. Many find themselves, from rank or birth or station, in this vexatious position in society; and the consequent irritation and sense of injustice sharpen their perspicacity to all the valid arguments of their own party, and to the weak points of the system which degrades itself by annoying them with needless disabilities and fruitless exactions.

Thus, in deterring from inquiry, on the one hand, and perverting the spirit of it, on the other, persecution is inimical alike to the means and to the motives for performing the great duty under our consideration. It is superfluous to enter at greater length on the consequences flowing in this particular direction from the forcible suppression of opinions; but a remark before suggested, presses again irresistibly on the mind. In most cases where this kind of interference takes place, the duty of investigation is a direct obligation to the Supreme Being; and if it is awfully presumptuous in any fallible mortal to prevent or pervert the fulfilment of so sacred a duty, by holding out to his fellow-creatures the temptation of benefit, what must be the insane arrogance of him who seeks to accomplish the same mischievous purpose by the infliction of misery?

'It is unconsciousness alone' (to borrow the language of a work before referred to) 'or an imperfect sense of the real character of his conduct, which redeems it from the blackest guilt. We should otherwise sink confounded at the audacious wickedness of that man who dared to

intermeddle, by pains and penalties of whatever degree or whatever kind, with the solemn duty of human beings to their Maker, and with the jurisdiction of their Omniscient Judge.' *

Let us next examine how far the forcible suppression of opinions will stand the test of the second principle.

Persecutors, it is certain, how exempt soever they may have been from any such notion as that of promoting the duty of inquiry, have often labored under the delusion, that they were assisting the people in the other object, the attainment of truth; they have actually believed that they were promoting the prevalence of sound and accurate opinions by preventing the free utterance of thought and communication of intelligence. The infatuation seems a strange one; but it has undoubtedly prevailed, and still continues amongst many who would not willingly be classed among the weak and the ignorant. It is scarcely necessary to enter here upon the proof — a proof already anticipated in the course of the preceding discussions — how effectually these deluded men were doing the contrary; how certainly, as far as their efforts were not defeated, they were engaged in fixing mankind in darkness and error. At this stage of our dissertation, it must be abundantly plain that in proportion as persecution for opinions is successful, it retards the progress of truth by precluding the interchange of knowledge, the emulous scrutiny of error, the quick comparison of results, and the thorough investigation of the processes by which they are attained. It is a brute obstacle, replunging the human race, as far as its power extends, into the disadvantages of that condition in which the physical means of general mental intercourse were unknown.

* Letters of an Egyptian Kafir, p. 120.

'Every species of intolerance,' says an eminent writer, 'which enjoins suppression and silence, and every species of persecution which enforces such injunctions, is adverse to the progress of truth; forasmuch as it causes that to be fixed by one set of men, at one time, which is much better and with much more probability of success, left to the independent and progressive inquiries of separate individuals. Truth results from discussion and controversy; is investigated by the labors and researches of private persons. Whatever, therefore, prohibits these, obstructs that industry and that liberty which it is the common interest of mankind to promote.' *

But happily such intolerance carries with it, in that reaction which, as already shown, it usually calls forth, some compensation for the injuries inflicted by it on the cause of truth. When this monstrous practice is not pushed to extremity, — where its merciless designs cannot be carried into complete effect, — where it is mitigated by the existence of large bodies who resist it, — where it is therefore only partial and intermittent, and is constantly denounced and defied, it is apt, as we have seen, not only to sharpen the sight and strengthen the convictions of its victims, but to shake existing prejudices in the community by the examination it provokes, and to extend the influence of the doctrines against which it is levelled.

Seldom, indeed, is the exciting effort of such intolerance confined to those on whom it personally falls. The records of the world sufficiently attest that persecution awakens the attention of parties who are not immediately interested, to questions otherwise not likely to attract their notice, and leads to such trains of reflection as silently sap, if they do not forcible subvert, the foundations of

* Moral Philosophy, Book vi. chap. 10.

prejudice. Both sympathy and curiosity are roused; the fate of the victim is commiserated; the opinions which have drawn down vengeance upon him are scrutinized, and the issue frequently is, that they establish themselves in the heart and in the understanding of the inquirer.

Such results, although they constitute no merit on the part of the persecutor, must be allowed, in whatever degree they take place, to lessen the effectiveness of intolerance in checking the progress of knowledge. After every possible alleviation, however, from energies roused, opposition provoked, and curiosity awakened, there is still a large residuum of evil. It is the very essence of persecution, in proportion as it prevails, to injure the cause of truth, and therefore of human happiness, by preventing the utterance of opinions; thus circumscribing the number of inquirers, insulating their thoughts, and as far as its power reaches, condemning man, with indefinite capabilities of improvement by intercourse with his species, to that incapacity of communicating and transmitting his impressions, which is the natural doom of the brute.

CHAPTER VII.

CONCLUSION.

The views which have now been presented of the duty of inquiry essentially differ, it must be confessed, from the opinions and practices of mankind in general.

The state of society at present on this great subject, it is not too harsh to say, is a state of barbarism. Whoever looks abroad must admit, that in the most enlightened countries existing in the world, gross ignorance of the duties of man to God, and of man to man, in relation to the pursuit of truth, abounds. In this vital matter, no where is that conduct which is really virtuous regarded with approbation, — no where is that which is really vicious condemned: there is no well-directed sensibility; no nice discernment; no correct appreciation of merit; no consistent adherence even to admitted principles; honesty of inquiry is subverted by temptation, or overwhelmed with disgrace and persecution; while unenlightened or criminal acquiescence is fostered and recompensed.

The best wish that can arise in the heart of any lover of his species is, that this deplorable condition of humanity may be relieved; the best mental change that can happen to mankind is an enhancement of their intellectual discriminations, and a revolution in their moral sentiments, in regard to the pursuit of truth.

If any one should ask how such a change is to be

brought about, there appears to be only one answer. It can be accomplished by no magic. It must be effected by repeated discussions, by bringing the necessary distinctions frequently into view, by an earnest endeavor to shake off error, clear up obscurity and disentangle confusion, and by holding up our well-considered conclusions on the subject before the eyes of our fellow-creatures. These are the appointed and appropriate means by which only we can purposely hasten a revolution from error to truth in the opinions of mankind, and in the practices founded upon them.

With such views the present work has been written. To contribute in some measure, however small, to the accomplishment of these noble ends, it is now sent forth to the world. The rigid consistency with which it aims to apply in every direction the great principles of morality connected with the pursuit of truth, may be expected to draw down on its doctrines all the ill-will which ignorance and bigotry will dare to manifest; but, on the other hand, it is not too much to hope that the same feature will insure it a candid, if not a cordial, reception from the real lovers of truth and the best friends of humanity. In bringing it to a close, the writer cannot but feel the conscious satisfaction of having (however inefficiently) labored in singleness of spirit for an object of inestimable value.

ESSAY

ON THE

PROGRESS OF KNOWLEDGE.

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PART I.

A. I AM glad that we have disengaged ourselves from the company, as I am not altogether satisfied with the opinions you have been expressing on the character and condition of mankind. They are too disheartening.

N. Are they true? That is the only inquiry worthy of a rational being.

A. When I say they are too disheartening, I mean that they go beyond the truth in the low estimate which they exhibit of human nature. In the present day, I should hardly contest any opinions on any other ground.

N. After all, what have I said? I have said, and I repeat, that when we look back into the history of the human race we can scarcely help feeling ashamed that we belong to it. Man is an animal in a very slight degree rational by nature. It seems to require ages upon ages to bring the race to any thing like a state of reason — a state where prejudice and passion are subordinate to the understanding, where man controls the blind impulse of the present by a view of the future, and distinctly perceives his relative position in the universe. It is certain that mankind have hitherto never reached such a state.

Let any one look around him, and what does he observe? A few minds perhaps capable of raising themselves into the pure atmosphere of truth, of emancipating themselves from the domination of mere instinct, of expatiating through the moral and material world with full liberty of intellect, and of appreciating the exact relation in which they stand to the existences around them; but the majority — nine hundred and ninety-nine in a thousand — the slaves of prejudice and the dupes of passion, inflicting misery upon themselves and others from gross ignorance of the real tendencies of action and the rational object of existence; shrinking from truth as from a spectre; frightened by imaginary terrors; incapable of pursuing more than one step of argument, yet pertinacious in their own infallibility; humbling themselves in the dust as unworthy to approach the God whom they tremble to think of, while they confess his unbounded benevolence, yet assuming their actions to be of such immense importance to him as to require the discipline of eternity at his hands. The meanness of men's reasoning powers in general is almost incredible. Locke, if I mistake not, terms a man who can advance two steps in reasoning a man of two syllogisms. There are few such to be found. The majority of mankind are men of one syllogism, or of less. The faculty of taking two steps in reasoning without assistance — leading strings — is rare; that of taking three belongs to one in an age. It stamps a man as the wonder of his day.

A. Yet with these mean understandings, these limited faculties, how much has the human race accomplished? You must admit, that men in the present day are superior, wonderfully superior, in knowledge and wisdom to their progenitors three thousand or even three hundred years ago; that they have discarded some methods of rendering themselves miserable, and opened a few fresh springs of

happiness. In a word, there has been an advance in the discrimination of good and evil. You will not contend that men are incapable of progressive improvement, chained for ever like the brutes to the circle of individual attainment, doomed generation after generation to commence at one point and to tread the same round. No! human improvement, thank God, admits of successive advances, each generation starts from the ground at which the last had expended its strength in arriving; and I will venture to say, that this single circumstance is sufficient to carry the race to a degree of knowledge which it is impossible for us to conceive. Oh! that I could live to see the results of another century of progression.

N. The principle of the progressive improvement of mankind, and the consequences resulting from it, I acknowledge as well as yourself. It was implied indeed in my assertion, that it required ages upon ages to bring the race to any thing like a state of rationality; an assertion, which, while it admits the tendency to improvement, certainly encourages no very sanguinary expectations of the rapidity of the progress. In our anticipations on this point we differ. When I look back on the past, or around me on the present, I cannot help feeling convinced, that if men are to advance, as I think they inevitably must, it will be by a very slow march. There are a thousand obstacles in the way. It is but a poor eulogy on human capabilities, that mankind have been four or five thousand years in attaining to their present partial and imperfect civilization, which extolled as it generally has been, is scarcely entitled to the appellation of semi-barbarism. If we are to be guided by experience, if we are to expect hereafter only what we have found in the past, our anticipations of the rapidity of future improvement will not be very extravagant.

A. Consider the wars and disorders which have heretofore constantly checked the career of civilization. But for the madness of ambition, how far it would have already advanced!

N. These wars and disorders were the necessary consequences of those narrow faculties, that incapacity of reasoning, that blindness to their real interests, which I charge on the human race. To say in defence of human nature, that it would have improved faster had not these things happened, is only to affirm, that if it had been endowed with superior sense, it would not have exhibited so much folly.

A. There is one thing, however, which you must allow to be much in favor of those anticipations which look for a more rapid advance in future than has hitherto been experienced — the invention of printing.

N. That indeed is the noblest acquisition of science; it is the impregnable fortress of civilization; no political changes, no physical vicissitudes, no mutation short of the complete extinction of mankind, can henceforth ever restore the empire of the world to ignorance. But admitting all the benefits of this invention, it is not in the nature of the human mind to advance with rapidity. The onward strides of improvement may be sure, but they will be slow. Genius may burst away from the steady march of the race, and penetrate into regions which it will be the work of future generations completely to explore; but all its energy will not suffice to drag on the main body faster than the regular pace to which the nature of its powers inevitably confine it.

A. You appear to forget, that as by the press the cultivation of knowledge extends itself over greater numbers, a greater portion of talent will be brought out; prejudices will give way in a shorter time, and improvements be

adopted with less reluctance. Consider how rapid has been the progress of science within the last fifty years, compared with an equal term during the middle ages.

N. Of physical science it is true. It labors under a part only of those obstructions which impede the science of human nature. Yet even here we may mark several of those impediments which doom the species to a tardy progression; —the dulness and inertness of the faculties to discover truth, the interests arrayed against its reception, the difficulty of sundering the established bonds of mental association. Besides, there is a puny sort of self-love in every department of knowledge, which desires the prevalence and stability of opinions because they are *its* opinions. It cannot find in its heart to fancy itself at all in error. Instead of wishing for the progress and spread of truth, however subversive of established doctrines, and that mankind should be continually detecting their errors and adding to their acquirements, instead of exulting at the prospect which the future presents of receding darkness and advancing light, this contemptible selfishness would have the world to stand still for ever at the point which itself has attained, and poises its own gratification against the comprehensive interests of mankind, its own shallow pretensions against the growing science of the age, and the intellect of myriads of unborn generations. It would bind down all the great spirits which are yet to advance the happiness and elevate the dignity of man to its own blind dogmas and narrow spheres of vision, and permit no other intellectual movement in the world than an approximation to those opinions which itself has chanced to adopt.

A. You are severe.

N. Severe! Would it not exhaust the patience of the meekest philosopher — a designation to which I have no

pretensions — to see men who have possessed themselves of the established quantum of information constantly parading it as the *ne plus ultra* of knowledge, and stifling or attempting to stifle every symptom of improvement lest their own personal consequence should be scratched?

A. I am perfectly aware of the extensive prevalence of the feelings you describe, which, joined to the disinclination, perhaps disability, that every man has to enter into trains of ideas totally at variance with his habitual modes of thinking, protract the reign of error even where interest is not engaged in its support. The conduct of the medical men in relation to Harvey's discovery is a notorious instance in point.* But these obstacles give way.

N. True. Men die off; and they are succeeded by others, whose minds are imbued with truer principles, and who do not feel their reputation pledged against improvement. This, however, is a slow process. By your own showing, a prejudice exposed as false can perish only with the generation to which it adheres. A rapid advance truly, when every step of improvement requires at least an age!

A. We have instances, nevertheless, in which discoveries have met with a pretty general reception in their own times; those of modern chemistry, for instance.

N. Yet Priestley could not part with the doctrine of phlogiston. As he was a man who held his opinions with less than common pertinacity, an inquirer open to conviction to the day of his death — not one of those who early in life packet up their miserable stock of knowledge and label it complete — his is a striking instance how tenaciously a theory once received adheres to the understanding. I grant, however, that physical science ad-

* See Appendix, Note F.

vances more rapidly, and disseminates its improvements with more ease, than moral and political knowledge. It would seem that just in proportion as knowledge is unimportant it meets with a readier reception.

A. Do you really intend to insinuate that chemistry, and the other physical sciences, are unimportant? Call to mind the power which they have given to man over nature — how well they have answered Lord Bacon's description of the rational end of knowledge.

N. I do not call these pursuits unimportant, except comparatively; but I maintain that they are incalculably inferior in their effects upon human happiness to those sciences which explore the nature of man and the tendencies of action, and which in the present day, notwithstanding the circumstances which force them in some degree on general reflection, are disgracefully neglected.

A. Not all. The science of Political Economy has surely received its due share of attention. Some of the first intellects of modern times have fixed their grasp upon it.

N. True. This is an exception, a glorious exception; and if anything could render me more sanguine in my anticipations of political melioration, it would be the progress of this science, the irresistible manner in which it has insinuated itself into our councils and moulded our policy. Twenty or thirty years ago the doctrines of Adam Smith were apparently a dead letter; his book was considered by that sapient race, the practical men, as full of Utopian dreams. Pitt did not fully comprehend it, and Fox declared it past understanding.* A first-rate states-

* Mr. Butler in his Reminiscences tells us, that Mr. Fox confessed he had never read the Wealth of Nations; adding: 'There is something in all these subjects which passes my comprehension; some-

man in the present day would be scouted for equal ignorance. The prevalence of this science will do good. Its severe logic, its rigorous requisitions to keep in view the meaning of terms, the beautiful dependence of its long series of propositions, will accustom men to think with more accuracy and precision, while they render it even a delightful exercise for a masculine understanding. It is a lever which will move the world.*

A. We have here, then, an instance in which a science, and that not a physical science, has advanced with considerable rapidity.

N. Pardon me. Political Economy is itself a proof that the dissemination of new truths is restricted by the nature of the human mind to what I may venture to term a very moderate rate. It was necessary that the contemporaries of Adam Smith should be succeeded by another generation before his doctrines could prevail.†

thing so wide, that I could never embrace them myself, or find any one who did.' — Vol. i. p. 187.

* It would be out of place here to do more than protest against the disparaging estimate of this '*pretended science*' by M. Comte in his Course of Positive Philosophy, a work abounding in unquestionable ability and disputable doctrines. It is to be regretted that previous to being committed to the press it was not stripped of the prolixity (in this case most remarkable) incident to the form of lectures. An analysis and review of the whole by a master-hand would be invaluable to the English reader.

† 'At the interval of half a century, the speculations of this great author have been incorporated in the practices of government. *This is the time which truth and wisdom have taken to travel from the philosopher's study to the senate-house;* and at length, after having struggled its way through many obstructions, the system of free trade is not only recognized, but is begun to be acted upon in the regulation of commercial affairs.' — Dr. CHALMERS *on Endowments*, Preface, p. xi.

A. What will you say, however, to the improvements of Malthus, Say, Ricardo, and others? These have been generally, if not universally, admitted by their contemporaries.

N. Where is your proof? Not to enter into the question, whether the writings of these authors contain any valuable discoveries, I will venture to assert, that the number of people, who fully understand the true nature of any improvements which have been introduced into the science since the days of Adam Smith, scarcely amounts to a few hundreds. No! we must all die before these things can be generally understood. To comprehend them belongs not to our age.

A. It is my turn to ask for proof.

N. I refer you to the Reviews. How few of the Reviewers of Mr. Malthus, M. Say, or Mr. Ricardo* have ventured to grapple with their doctrines. To enter into reasonings of this kind is a tasking of the intellect to which few writers can submit, and which would scarcely promote the popularity of a periodical work. I refer you to the House of Commons. Of the number of those who are nightly employed in the discussion of economical topics, how many are there fully in possession of even the acknowledged principles of the subject?

A. Neither the Reviews nor the House of Commons can be reasonably expected to be in the very van of a difficult science, although doubtless splendid exceptions might be named. But to return to your assertion respecting the slow advance of the science of man, I am disposed to think it more rapid than you are willing to allow, and that the contrary opinion on your part arises from the few changes which have appeared in our civil

* See Note G, in Appendix.

and political institutions. Now it is very possible that knowledge on a particular subject may have been making a great progress for years, and yet not have manifested itself in the modification of existing establishments. Nay, this seems absolutely necessary: for, before any effects can appear in practice, it is requisite, in the first place, that the discoveries should have been made; and, secondly, that they should have been familiarized by dissemination. Hence it is not fair to measure the progress of a science at any given period by its practical results.

N. I concede some weight to your remarks. But what examples would you select of improvements in moral and political science apart from practice?

A. After Political Economy, which we have already considered, I should adduce Legislation, Moral and Intellectual Philosophy generally, and the Philosophy of Physical Inquiry in particular, and also the Theory of Language.

N. I see whom you are aiming at. You doubtless have in your eye Bentham, Dr. Thomas Brown, Horne Tooke, and a few others.

A. You might have guessed more widely of the truth. I hesitate not to express my conviction, that these writers have made important advances in their several pursuits. I know the reluctance with which their claims are admitted, but I suspect that few have taken the trouble to understand their works.

N. So! You are coming round I perceive to my opinion; for you must acknowledge, that if few have taken the trouble to understand writers of this class and character, the rate at which their discoveries are propagated must be very tardy. Believe me, my dear Sir, these men belong to the next age. The truths, which they have promulgated, must be familiarized in elementary

treatises, taught in the schools, wrought into our lighter literature, and instilled into the minds of another generation before they can be generally received. It is a common error to consider the achievements of a few great minds as indicative of the state of civilization to which the community at large has attained. Men of genius leave their contemporaries a century behind. There is an eloquent passage in a writer of some celebrity so much to the point, that I must beg to quote it in illustration of my views. 'We cannot help remarking,' says he, 'what a deception we suffer to pass on us from history. It celebrates some period in a nation's career as pre-eminently illustrious for magnanimity, lofty enterprise, literature, and original genius. There was perhaps a learned and vigorous monarch, and there were Cecils and Walsinghams, and Shakspeares and Spensers, and Sidneys and Raleighs, with many other powerful thinkers and actors, to render it the proudest age of our national glory. And we thoughtlessly admit on our imagination this splendid exhibition as representing, in some indistinct manner, the collective state of the people in that age. The ethereal summits of a tract of the moral world are conspicuous and fair in the lustre of heaven, and we take no thought of the immensely greater proportion of it which is sunk in gloom and covered with fogs. The general mass of the population, whose physical vigor, indeed, and courage, and fidelity to the interests of the country, were of such admirable avail to the purposes, and under the direction of the mighty spirits that wielded their rough agency; this great mass was sunk in such mental barbarism, as to be placed about the same distance from their illustrious intellectual chiefs, as the hordes of Scythia from the most elevated minds of Athens.' *

* Essay on Popular Ignorance, by John Foster, p. 71.

A. A noble passage, eloquent in language and felicitous in illustration: but you surely do not regard it as applicable to modern times?

N. I look upon it as a pretty faithful picture of the state of things in the present day. He who, not content with imposing reports and statistical results, comes into actual contact with the real body of the people, will find an immeasurable difference between the average of their intelligence and the luminous and comprehensive views which fill the eye of a Bentham or a Brown, or any other man of genius whose name may be employed to mark the farthest point of intellectual progression.

PART II.

N. It appears to me, that in our last conversation on the progressive improvement of mankind, we differed only in regard to its rapidity, you contending for a much quicker progress than I am disposed to anticipate. The difference between us, however, scarcely affects any of the important consequences flowing from the general principle.

A. Your arguments, although forcibly urged, by no means shook the previous conviction of my mind; but what are the consequences to which you particularly allude?

N. The most cursory glance at the subject is sufficient to suggest a thousand valuable inferences, some of them widely at variance with prevalent opinions. For instance, if all kinds of knowledge necessarily improve, it is vain to look for the soundest principles, the deepest insight into nature, in our older writers.

A. That is a conclusion which is certainly little accordant with the theories of the day. Even I, sanguine as I am of the future, should hesitate to accede to it.

N. The ground of this prepossession in favor of old writers is evidently a false analogy, which Lord Bacon has well exposed. In every subject which admits of an accession of knowledge, the best writers must be in time superseded. To a later age they must often appear tedious, wasting their powers on trifles, attempting formally to establish what is obviously absurd or what no one

disputes, or tasking their strength in the prolix exposure of fallacies, the true character of which may now be shown in a few sentences. Such works after a certain period are consulted only on account of their reputation, for their style, or for the pleasure of tracking the steps of a great mind. The works of Bacon and Locke are already becoming instances in point. They are more talked of than read; and if you will pardon a homely expression, oftener dipped into than waded through.

A. We have works, nevertheless, and those not works of art, but what in contradistinction may be called works of knowledge, which will not be readily superseded.

N. It would be difficult to name them. I will not deny, however, the possibility of a doctrine being so concisely and clearly established, that the demonstration may never be displaced by a better. Even in such cases, the doctrine in process of time appears so intuitive as not to require proof.

A. It seems to be an unavoidable inference from your remarks, that the study of old authors is a waste of labor.

N. Much of it is an exhaustion of the strength to no purpose. This obsolete learning is well enough for minds of a secondary cast, but it only serves to hamper the man of original genius. It is unwise in such a one to enter very minutely into the history of the science to which he devotes himself — more especially at the outset. Let him perfectly master the present state of the science, and he will be prepared to push it farther while the vigor of his intellect remains unbroken; but if he previously attempt to embrace all that has been written on the subject, to make himself acquainted with all its exploded theories and obsolete doctrines, his mind will probably be too much entangled in their intricacies to make any original efforts; too wearied with tracing past achievements to carry the science

to a farther degree of excellence.* When a man has to take a leap he is materially assisted by stepping backward a few paces, and giving his body an impulse by a short run to the starting place; but if his precursory range is too extensive, he exhausts his forces before he comes to the principal effort.

A. The general voice is against your doctrine. Old authors are universally considered as treasures of deep thought, mines of wisdom, from which the young aspirant after distinction is recommended to extract the ore, which he is to beat out and embellish for the public use. I think you underrate them.

N. Do not mistake me. I reverence as much as any man the great intellects which have been employed in raising the structure of science. It is no disparagement to the illustrious men of past times, that their errors are pointed out, and that shorter and easier methods are found of accomplishing that which it required all their efforts to effect. With intellects far greater perhaps than any sub-

* In harmony with the general scope of the observations here made, a French writer, before cited, M. Comte, has well characterized two modes of exposition (and the same distinction holds good in the study as well as in the explanation of science), one the *historic*, the other the *dogmatic;* the former presenting a science in the order in which it has been brought to its present state, the latter presenting it as it would be formed by a mind whose intelligence sufficed to take at once a view of the whole. In proportion as a science advances, the first method becomes more and more impracticable by the long series of intermediate steps through which the mind would be dragged; while on the other hand, the second method increases in facility in the same proportion. Ordinary men (he proceeds to say) could never be placed on a level with the actual state of science, brought about by the labors of a long line of master-spirits, if every individual had to pass through the successive steps which have been necessarily trod by the collective genius of the human race. See *Cours de Philosophie Positive*, tome i. p. 77.

sequent laborers in the same cause, they may be surpassed in extent and accuracy of knowledge at a later period by men of the most limited capacity. Such is the necessary condition of human improvement. All that an individual can effect is comparatively trivial. His powers of original inference are bounded to a few steps. The works of one must be elevated on those of another. Meanwhile beauty of style, elegance of illustration, perspicuity of arrangement, and ingenuity of inference — all that constitutes a book a work of art — may be imperishable.

A. Your view of the subject seems to militate against all claims to originality. If one man is to build on the discoveries of another, his best works can only be like stones in the edifice, while it is surely the ambition of every man of genius to erect a structure of his own.

N. This notion, that a man should produce something exclusively his own, unconnected with any thing previously accomplished, in order to entitle him to the praise of originality, has given rise to a good deal of vain contention about the claims of individuals to particular discoveries and inventions. A casual expression, a barren assertion, an imperfect and unsteady approximation to an important truth, has been singled out to invalidate the just pretensions of the man of original genius, who has planted a firm foot on ground of which it is possible indeed that a glimpse had been previously caught, but which had never been actually reached; and who has opened to our delighted minds a vista of consequences which seems more like a creation than a discovery. Thus the originality of Newton in his doctrine of Gravitation has been disputed on the ground of some approaches to this principle by Hook; that of Hume, in his views of the relation of Cause and Effect, on the strength of expressions in sundry writers; that of Malthus, in his principles of Population, on account

of some passages in Wallace, Stuart, and Smith; and that of Dalton, in his chemical theory of Definite Proportions, in consequence of an imperfect anticipation of it by Higgins. The truth is, that the originality demanded by such critics is an originality which cannot exist; it is purely chimerical, and the ambition of attaining it can lead only to extravagant paradoxes and baseless theories. Whoever wishes to be original in the only practicable way, must rise from the improvements of others. A living writer* has well characterized this originality in the case of the doctrine of population, when he remarks that Mr. Malthus took an obvious and familiar truth, which till his time had been a barren truism, and showed that it teemed with consequences.

A. I acknowledge that he who can do this may well be content with himself.

N. Yet the critics will quote the familiar truth to prove that the consequences were not original. But this is absurd on any theory but that which requires in every invention or discovery a perfect insulation from preceding achievements, before it is entitled to that praise. The slightest connection with what has been previously accomplished, seems in the eyes of these dreamers to divest it of this character. To trace the way in which it was effected, or the steps of the process, is with them the same thing as destroying its claims to admiration. In contradiction to all this, I will venture to affirm that it is invariably owing to the state of a science at the time when a man takes it up, that he is able to make his peculiar discoveries. Hence those fugitive glimpses, those scattered lights, those casual touches in writings of the same date. The minds of a number of individuals seem to be contemporaneously

* Mr. De Quincey.

laboring with obscure intimations of the same truth, till in the most vigorous amongst them it struggles from its obscurity and bursts into day. 'The greatest inventor in science,' says an eminent philosopher, 'was never able to do more than to accelerate the progress of discovery.'*

A. But surely your representation of the matter has a tendency to lessen the merit of invention, or at least our admiration of it.

N. On the contrary, it shows us where admiration is due, and what are the grounds on which we should grant it, as well as explodes the flimsy pretences on which it is sometimes professed to be withheld. What is still better, it exhibits the real process of invention and discovery, and proves that they must necessarily go on, however slowly, so long as there is any thing to invent or discover.

A. In this point we perfectly agree. Hence the folly of shutting the mind to further improvement, — of conceiving, as many people are apt to do, that they have mastered the sciences once and for ever.

N. Mastered the sciences! A man in the present day with regard to the sciences is something like Virgil's boatman, *si brachia fortè remisit*, he loses his place — he is in effect carried backward. There is a perpetual necessity for exertion if he would maintain his relative position in the world of intellect; and from this necessity arises much of that hostility to improvement which characterizes the dull and the indolent. Thus what should yield delight proves a source of mortification; for what in reality can be more exhilarating than the thought, that thousands of minds are constantly at work upon new improvements and discoveries, that every year may bring some correction to our errors and solve some of our difficulties, and that as

* Playfair's Works, vol. ii. p. 52.

long as we live, new lights will pour upon our understandings? A right view of the subject would show us, that every man of genius, of enterprise, and of research, is laboring for our gratification, smoothing the path for our steps, and illuminating objects to delight our vision. When the warm glow of youthful feeling has passed away, I know of nothing so worthy to replace it, nothing so well calculated to relieve the insipidity of middle life, as the prospect of continual advances in knowledge, inspiring hopes which are perpetually gratified and perpetually renewed. An adequate view — a deep impression of the progressive character of science is utterly inconsistent with that overweening confidence which causes a man to place his own opinions as the limit of improvement.

A. If this is preposterous in an individual, it is surely equally so in a body of men. What then shall we say of a set of immutable propositions on any subject whatever? —a series of doctrines laid down as absolute truths never to be altered?

N. I should certainly pronounce it a grand mistake in the science of the human mind. There is not a single subject which exercises the faculties of man that may not be improved — nay, that will not be improved — by the efforts of successive generations. It would be an unpardonable degree of arrogance in an assemblage of the wisest men that ever lived, supposing that they could be brought together, to circumscribe any subject whatever within the narrow boundaries of their own opinions. It would betray a total misconception of the relations of the human mind to the objects around it. I have contended, that men in the present day are superior in knowledge to their predecessors; but on the same grounds those who come after us will be superior to the existing generation. It is highly probable indeed, how mortifying soever the

reflection may be to our personal consequence, that we in this age are mere barbarians compared with the race who shall hereafter fill the earth; and surely for us to erect a standard of opinion for beings likely to be so infinitely superior to ourselves is too absurd to need exposure, and can scarcely fail to provoke many a compassionate smile in the future ages of the world.

A. Absurd enough in all conscience. We are too apt, I confess, to consider our own age as enlightened almost to the utmost extent of human capacity. When we reflect upon the wonderful discoveries of modern astronomy, on the brilliant operations of chemical analysis, on the new lights darted into the gloom of past ages by geology, on the comprehensive truths of political economy, — when we survey our ships and our commerce, our steam-engines and our gas-lights and balloons, our canals and piers and bridges,* — in the exultation of having taken a giant-stride, we fancy ourselves already arrived at the goal. The truth is, however, that all these considerations are but so many arguments for modesty and diffidence. If the present age has excelled those which have preceded it, this result is owing to circumstances still in full activity, and which will inevitably carry the next generation far beyond us. It is often said that we are presumptuous in thinking ourselves more knowing than our ancestors, but we forget the presumption of arrogating a superiority over our successors.

N. It is curious to speculate on the consequences of this inevitable progression. The multiplication of books,

* To this enumeration (written about twenty years ago) may now be added steam-carriages, railroads, the daguerréotype, and the electrotype: the two former likely to effect an extensive revolution in the manners, habits, and tastes of society; the two latter, the most beautiful results of science in the present century.

for instance, will give rise to some singular phenomena. What a vast accumulation of literature, should the world continue a thousand or twenty thousand years longer without a geological submersion! What a weight of materials every year is adding to the stock of the historian! In process of time it will require the whole life of a man to become acquainted with the transactions of former ages, and the longest life will be insufficient to master the literature of a single country.

A. It will be the reign of Retrospective Reviews. A thousand years hence the literature of our own age may possibly furnish half a dozen nibbles to these fishers in the waters of oblivion. The splendor of intellect which envelops us will have dwindled into a mere luminous point, scarcely making its way athwart the intervening space — a star faintly visible in the night of ages. How mortifying to the personal vanity which makes itself the very sun of a system! But if we indulge in speculations of this nature we shall inevitably draw on ourselves the imputation of being visionary advocates of the perfectibility of man.

N. Such an imputation will scarcely be fixed on me, after what I have said in a former conversation on the slow progress of the human race. That there will be a progress, however, and an incessant one, is so far from being a visionary speculation, that I scarcely know a proposition which rests on a firmer basis. And the particular speculation on the future phenomena of literature is equally well founded. It is obvious that the art of printing has produced a complete revolution in the world of letters during the few centuries which have elapsed since its invention; the movement will continue — will be accelerated; the causes are still in activity, and acquiring new force. We have merely to represent to ourselves

therefore a repetition of what has already happened, only on a larger scale and with a somewhat more rapid career. Our conclusions on this subject must be drawn, not from the history of antiquity, but from that of modern times. Had Greece possessed the art of printing, the story of the human race would have been different beyond all conception from what it is.

A. If it had saved the world only from those ages of disputation in which the human mind seemed to spin round a circle without a single step of advancement, the benefit would have been invaluable. It is useless, however, to imagine what might have happened; a more interesting inquiry is, What will the future bring? Literature, Science, Political Institutions, Religion — all must pass through various changes, if there is any correctness in the principle of progressive improvement.

N. Literature and science we have already adverted to. A progress in these must be accompanied by progressive changes in our social and political institutions.* That they have not arrived at perfection, the slightest glance at the misery around us is all that is requisite to prove. The supposition that they will not be subject to changes would imply, either that while other kinds of knowledge were daily advancing, the science of social happiness was as complete as the nature of the subject allowed, and therefore susceptible of no improvement; or that the happiness of communities admitted of no addition, their misery of

* 'Il serait évidemment contradictoire,' observes M. Comte in the work already quoted, 'de supposer que l'esprit humain, si disposé à l'unité de méthode, conservât indéfiniment pour une seule classe de phénomènes sa manière primitive de philosopher lorsqu'une fois il est arrivé à adopter pour tout le reste une nouvelle marche philosophique, d'un caractère absolument opposé.' — *Cours*, tom. i. p. 20. See also Note H. in Appendix.

no diminution, from the most thorough insight into the various causes which produced them. The history of every country proves that a knowledge of these causes is one of the most difficult of acquisitions; that on no subject is man more easily deluded, less capable of extensive views, guilty of grosser mistakes, and yet more inveterately pertinacious in thinking himself infallible. Nor is there any subject on which the correction of an apparently small error has teemed with such important benefits to the world.

A. From all which, it most indubitably follows, that political knowledge and political institutions are predestined to improvement. What a source of sad anticipation to a multitude of politicians!

N. Already great changes have taken place, as any one will own who is at all conversant with the history of the past. Greater are in embryo. The blind veneration for rank, the feudal feeling, is obviously on the decline, and it is probable that it will be nearly extirpated in the course of ages. The tendency of political change is now evidently to republicanism; and it is not unlikely that the existing governments of Europe will gradually approximate to the form adopted in the United States of America. That form is at present unsuitable to the feelings and habits of Europeans, which still retain a strong tinge of the spirit of the middle ages. There are certain principles, however, which are making daily advances, and which in proportion as they subvert the ancient spirit of hereditary attachment, will render it unnecessary and substitute a better in its place. Such are the principles — that government is for the benefit of the whole community; that to ensure the attainment of this end, the will of the majority ought to prevail; that to secure the benefits of government, the people must strictly conform to

the regulations which they themselves have imposed; and the corollaries flowing from these propositions. Changes of this kind must not be expected too soon. We may alter on a sudden the forms of polity, but we cannot suddenly transform the spirits of men. This is the effect of time, or what is meant by that phrase, of innumerable successive circumstances, and it cannot be either much accelerated or much retarded. The slow progress of mankind is here more apparent than anywhere.

A. From your opinion respecting the tendency of political change to republicanism I must dissent; in no instance have we seen this form of government productive of greater advantages than the mixed; and I am strongly inclined to question whether any happier expedient can be devised than the hereditary descent of power.*

N. I am not anxious at present to discuss the merits of any forms of government. All that I mean to contend for is, that whichever is really the best must in the natural course of improvement establish its claims to preference. Men learn these things slowly, but experience must ultimately force them upon their understandings. The change in men's religious views will also probably be great. As mankind learn to reason more justly, they

* 'It appears to me,' says De Tocqueville, 'beyond a doubt, that sooner or later we shall arrive, like the Americans, at an almost complete equality of conditions. But I do not conclude from this, that we shall ever be necessarily led to draw the same political consequences which the Americans have derived from a similar social organization. I am far from supposing that they have chosen the only form of government which a democracy may adopt; but the identity of the efficient cause of laws and manners in the two countries is sufficient to account for the immense interest we have in becoming acquainted with its effects in each of them.'— *Introduction to Democracy in America*, p. 25.

will see the absurdity of many of their tenets. They will discover more and more clearly, that instead of the wise and benevolent Author of the Universe, they have been worshipping an image in their own minds endowed with similar imperfect faculties and passions to their own, nay, even invested with principles of action drawn from human nature in its rudest state. Men's conception of the Deity can never go beyond, although it frequently falls short of their moral opinions. He who has a narrow, confused, and indistinct view of what is really wise and admirable in human qualities, cannot have a clear and comprehensive idea of God. Hence, as moral knowledge advances, as mankind come more and more to fix their approbation on actions according to their actual desert, their conception of the Deity will become more refined, more elevated, and more worthy of its object. The proper way to exalt man's veneration of God is to teach him what is really just, benevolent, and magnanimous in his own race. It is melancholy to reflect on the sort of attributes and actions which are daily ascribed to the Supreme Being.

A. I have frequently been struck with the fact to which you have alluded, that men's conception of the Deity generally fall short of their moral opinions; but I have never been able to account satisfactorily for so remarkable a phenomenon. How is it, that even in the present day theological systems continue to invest the Deity, as you have expressed it, with principles of action drawn from human nature in its rudest state, and long since practically exploded in every civilized country?

N. The awfulness of the subject combines with the interests of men to produce a tardy application of their improved knowledge to their conception of the Author of the Universe. It is as if they entertained an obscure and undefined apprehension that any alteration in their ideas

regarding him would not simply be a change in their own minds, but would involve a modification of the nature and happiness of the Supreme Being himself. The veneration which they feel towards their Creator diffuses itself over their own dogmas. But your question has diverted me from the natural course of my remarks. I was going to observe, that mankind will not only necessarily perceive the absurdity of many of their tenets, but they will especially become sensible of the folly and wickedness of intolerance, that never-dying worm which preys on the vitals of human felicity. I am never so inclined to feel contempt for my own species as when I look into the history of religious persecution. It presents to us a combination of all that is weak with all that is wicked in our nature — the senseless activity of an idiot destroying his own happiness, with the malignity of a demon blasting that of others.

A. Language is too feeble to express the deep execration which is its just due. But I own I am more struck with the extreme folly, the childish weakness, the incapacity of just reasoning, involved in the slightest act of intolerance, than with any other of its features. In point of mere logic, such an act is absolutely disgraceful to the intellectual character of any one capable of drawing a single inference. Were it not for the sufferings of the victim, it would be altogether ludicrous. The puny, pitiful attempts at intolerance in our own day are miserably post-dated — absurd from their pretensions and contemptible from their impotence.

N. With my whole soul I agree with you as to the sentiments which these attempts ought to inspire; but I am of opinion that they are not so ill-timed nor so impotent as you imagine: in other words, I consider that there yet exists a more extensive spirit of intolerance than you are

aware of; subdued indeed from its original savageness, but deeply rooted and tenacious. There are also to be found more important cases of intolerance than your language implies. From all that I have myself observed of the spirit of society, I am decidedly of opinion, that the sympathies of the majority of the nation are in almost every case against and not in favor of the victim.

A. I should be pained to believe it.

N. I am convinced you will find it so; and this brings us again to the point before discussed, the over-estimation of the attainments and real civilization of the present age. The spirit of society on this subject may be looked upon as the thermometer of civilization — at least a high degree of what we include in that term cannot possibly exist where intolerance prevails. The two things are mutually destructive. The same remark may be applied to a still more enormous evil, or one at least that presents itself in greater and more distinct masses — WAR. The existence of war at all is a tremendous proof that mankind is not civilized. Again, then, we must conclude that we over-estimate our progress; that we are really but a little way removed from barbarism, in comparison with the possible point at which the race may arrive. And this would be a most salutary conviction; for while it would add to our alacrity by teaching us how much there was yet to discover, it would abate our presumption in the perfection of our present attainments. If I do not deceive myself, I foresee the time (far distant, alas!) when mankind shall awake to a full sense at once of their actual imperfections and of their capacity for illimitable improvement; when they shall cease to create their own misery, and to lavish their admiration on qualities that thrive on their ruin; 'when almost all the great political wonders, the idols of history, stripped one after another of the vain splendor

thrown around them, will appear nothing more than the frivolous and often fatal sports of the infancy of the human race.'*

* Rapports du Physique et du Moral de l'Homme, par J. G. Cabanis, tom. i. p. 340.

PART III.

A. In our previous conversations we have touched on the present state of society, but only in a general way; and we were chiefly occupied with the progress of the human race, and the principles on which such a progress might be looked for. I should like to hear your sentiments on some other features in the intellectual condition of our own times. My friend B. here, who differs in his general views from both of us, will assist me in the task of contesting any questionable propositions.

N. The field is wide: we have already endeavored to estimate the point reached in the scale of civilization; what other part of the subject have you particularly in view?

A. My views have reference chiefly to the state of moral and political intelligence and feeling. I think, for my own part, that society is in a curious condition in these respects. It seems to be laboring with a thousand incongruous principles and opinions.

N. I perfectly agree with you. When we examine the actual condition of society, we find amazing discrepancies in moral and political sentiment. We find even great contrariety in the same individual. He will be found, perhaps, without being aware of it, maintaining two opinions, mutually repugnant and contradictory; one opinion probably the result of instillation by his preceptors; the other his own acquisition from reading or conversation. Now, not being in the habit of deducing a

series of inferences, not being able to follow out any doctrine to its consequences, he is insensible to the contrariety existing between them, and perhaps would regard you with something like horror if you were to attempt to point it out. This is all very well, and cannot be avoided where, without much precision of ideas, there is any thing like a determination of the general intellect to moral and political inquiries; where men's knowledge begins to outstrip their prejudices, and yet is not disentangled from them. The same causes, however, give rise to other moral phenomena, not quite so free from culpability.

A. To what do you allude?

N. I allude to the concealment of opinions and feelings, to the insincerity, to the conventional simulation which abound in the present day. Every one must be struck with the discordance in tone between the sentiments of our literature, of our public debates, of our formal documents on the one hand, and those heard in private society and exhibited in the common habits of life on the other. The same individual who has been speaking to the popular prejudices of the day in public, will often let you see by a sneer or a jest, or at all events by the principles which regulate his daily conduct, that he has in reality been playing the actor and duping his audience. Hence our literature does not present us with the actual sentiments entertained. There is nothing like general sincerity in the profession of opinions. The intellect of the age is cowed.

B. A great part of what appears to be insincerity may perhaps be ascribed to a want of the power to perceive logical inconsistencies, and some part to the habit of thoughtlessly expressing in private society opinions not seriously entertained. It has been remarked by an able

writer, that were we to know what was said of us in our absence, we could seldom gather the real opinions of the speakers: 'there are so many things said from the mere wantonness of the moment, or from a desire to comply with the tone of the company; so many from the impulse of passion, or the ambition to be brilliant; so many idle exaggerations, which the heart in a moment of sobriety would disavow; that frequently the person concerned would learn anything sooner than the opinions entertained of him, and torment himself, as injuries of the deepest dye, with things injudicious perhaps and censurable, but which were the mere sallies of thoughtless levity.' * A similar observation may be made with regard to moral and political opinions. Things are said in the social or the listless hour, when the mind relaxes from the tension of steady thought, which would be disowned when the intellect had collected all its forces, and was calmly and solemnly looking at the whole bearings of the subject. Besides, if it were not so, I think you judge the matter too rigidly. Actual simulation of opinions I will not defend; but surely there is a species of dissimulation, or (not to use a word with which unfavorable associations are connected) of reserve or suppression, which far from being culpable may be prudent and even meritorious, nay, absolutely necessary. I think I once heard you assert, that if any man were now to promulgate the moral and political opinions (could they be known) which will generally prevail at the end of two hundred years from this time, he would be hooted from society.† In this sentiment I do not participate, as I see no room for so immense a change as it supposes, but on your own grounds a prudent reserve is commendable.

* Godwin's Inquirer, p. 312, ed. 1823. † See Appendix, Note I.

N. The sentiment was expressed perhaps too broadly; but without pretending to form a conjecture as to what such future opinions may be, I think it substantially correct. I will grant you, therefore, that it is prudent in a man to suppress any opinions flagrantly hostile to popular prejudice; but it is not, you will allow, high-minded; if it escape our contempt, it is not a species of conduct to raise the glow of enthusiastic admiration, to 'dilate our strong conception with kindling majesty,' and to elevate us for a time at least above the dead level of our nature. The poet says —

> 'Give me the line that ploughs its stately course,
> Like the proud swan, conquering the stream by force.'*

and I confess my admiration will always follow him who boldly breasts the current of popular prejudice, forcing his way by his native energy. Nor can I help thinking that such a man, if he combined undeviating coolness, moderation, integrity, and simplicity of mind, with great intellectual powers, would in the end extort the forbearance at least of the host of enemies who would rush to the encounter from the instinct of fear.

A. Such conduct would undoubtedly excite the admiration of a few, but it would be the destruction of the happiness of the individual unless he were singularly constituted. It is a fearful thing for any man to encounter the execration, or even the tacit condemnation, of the society in which he lives. And, moreover, it is questionable whether, supposing even his sentiments to be true, he would promote the cause of truth by such a bold and reckless course. For any system of thoughts to be received with effect, the minds of the community must be in a state of preparation for it. If promulgated too early,

* Cowper.

it is cast back into obscurity by the offended prejudices of society, or becomes a prominent object against which they are perpetually exasperating themselves. It is a light-house amidst the breakers. The genius of a Smeaton in philosophy would be required to erect an intellectual structure of this kind, capable at once of giving intense light, and withstanding the moral turbulence by which it would be assailed. A premature disclosure of any doctrine, you may rest assured, retards its ultimate reception. In fact, a forbearance to utter all that a man thinks is a species of continence necessary throughout the whole progress of civilization; at every step the commanding minds of the age being in one state, and the feelings and opinions of the majority in another directly hostile to it.*

B. I cannot exactly see the necessity of a discrepancy of this nature; but admitting that the commanding intellects of the age must thus differ in their views on many

* 'And here may I be permitted to caution my readers against the common error of confounding the double doctrine of Machiavelian politicians, with the benevolent reverence for established opinions manifested in the noted maxim of Fontenelle — "that a wise man, even when his hand was full of truths, would often content himself with opening his little finger." Of the advocates for the former, it may be justly said, that "they love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil;" well knowing, if I may borrow the words of Bacon, "that the open daylight doth not show the masks and mummeries and triumphs of the world, half so stately as candle-light." The philosopher on the other hand, who is duly impressed with the latter, may be compared with the oculist, who, after removing the cataract of his patient, prepares the still irritable eye, by the glimmering dawn of a darkened apartment, for enjoying in safety the light of day.' — *Dissertation on the Progress of Philosophy*, by DUGALD STEWART, p. 23. On this subject a remarkable letter addressed by Mirabeau to Sir Samuel Romilly has recently appeared in the life of the latter by his sons, vol. i. p. 294. I have given a copious extract from it in the APPENDIX, Note K.

points from the bulk of mankind, it by no means follows that all who thus differ are to be ranked in that class. On the contrary, I should be inclined to say, that to be widely at variance with our own age, is in most cases a mark of unsound understanding; and this seems more especially to follow (turning to N.) from *your* principles; for if the human mind is so exceedingly slow at the work of invention and discovery as I have often heard you represent it to be, it is an obvious inference, that we are not to look for many of those gigantic strides which place the man of genius far in advance of his contemporaries. The chances are, therefore, that singular views are erroneous views. Hence a proper diffidence in himself, a sense of that liability to error which no one ought to feel more deeply than the philosopher, should make him hesitate when he finds his opinions peculiar to his own mind.

N. True, it should make him review them, probe them to the quick, try them by every possible test; but having done this, it would be absolutely culpable to suppress them merely from the consideration that they were singular, and therefore likely enough to be tainted with error. The latter, indeed, is a condition under which every man must promulgate his opinions.

A. But to return to the numerous diversities of opinion in society: my remark on that head was intended to apply not to the discrepancies in the opinions of the same mind, but to the differences subsisting between individuals and classes. It is astonishing, that with access apparently to the same sources of knowledge, under the same civil and political institutions, with almost perfect freedom of intercommunication, operated upon daily by the same current of periodical intelligence from one end of the land to the other, pursuing similar occupations and similar amusements, the people should be divided into so great a variety

of sects and parties, many of them of the most dissimilar and opposite modes of thinking. The fact is strikingly shown by the publications, and particularly the periodical publications of the day. Thus, not to mention that there is one set of journals for the ministerial party in politics, another for the opposition, another for the reformers, with advocates for a thousand intermediate shades of opinion, we have journals for the evangelical, the orthodox, the unitarians, the methodists, the deists, the phrenologists, the co-operatives, and others which might be specified; and these advocating, each of them, doctrines essentially repugnant and contradictory to those of all the rest. Is it not strange, that under the influence of all the common circumstances which I have just enumerated, such very opposite views should prevail, and be advocated not only with considerable knowledge and skill, but with the most thorough conviction of their truth? Does it not prove, either that truth is unattainable in moral, religious, and political inquiries, or that men have rushed into the midst of these subjects without stopping to ascertain the first principles on which they all must agree, and thus have involved themselves in a chaos of contradictions?

N. You recollect, I dare say, the remark of Locke, that although we cannot affirm that there are fewer opinions prevalent in the world than there are, yet fewer persons entertain them than we are apt to suppose; most people not having any clear ideas on those questions about which so much controversy is raised, and on which they themselves loudly assert their positive judgment.

A. But still you must allow, that the leading minds of each party do really hold them, especially in cases where interest is out of the question, which is sufficient for my purpose, it being in fact still more extraordinary that minds of this description, minds consequently of con-

siderable powers and superior information, with the same sources open to them, should exhibit such contradictory appearances, or in other words entertain such opposite views.

N. Such discrepancies show, that the individual circumstances which shape our opinions predominate over the general causes to which we are all subjected. They can exist only in a very imperfect state of knowledge, such as I have contended ours to be, where men's modes of thinking have resulted from chances of a thousand kinds, and have not originated in a systematic deduction from undeniable premises. You, I think, have well described the general course of even thoughtful men, rushing into the midst of subjects without an examination of first principles and a regular progress from them; or rather they find themselves from circumstances in the midst of the subjects, and never think of remounting to any primary truths, or stepping out of the magic circle described around them by the age and country and rank in which they came into existence. Engrossed with the established ideas of their system, they exercise their ingenuity in discovering the relations of its parts; and in the pleasure of the occupation, they never think of setting themselves at a distance from it, viewing its external aspect, marking its position in the world of intellect, surveying its relations as a whole to truth and to nature. This is frequently exemplified in the laborious trifling of antiquaries and commentators, who will often display wonderful skill and acuteness in the adjustment of some worthless point, which their own exertions alone have invested with something like importance. The weakest theory, or the most fallacious system of philosophy, will, in like manner, hold in bondage the strongest minds, who are often so intensely occupied with its intrinsic relations as to forget its extrin-

sic absurdity. In the limits by which they are thus circumscribed, they sometimes exert the highest powers of intellect, and leave nothing for us to bewail but the barriers with which birth and education and other circumstances have surrounded their understandings. A mind thus hemmed in is in a situation somewhat similar to that of a man who has been shut up in a strong castle from his birth, and has therefore had no means of viewing the outward appearance and relative position of the building. His conception too of external objects, as it has been acquired merely by glimpses through the window, is narrow and imperfect; and his comparative estimate of such external objects, and those within his reach, must be disproportionate to their real difference. Let him once escape from the castle, and his ideas undergo a complete revolution. He gets into the pure breezes of heaven, the open daylight, and the free exercise of vision. A similar happy transition is experienced by the mind which has once disengaged itself from the prejudices of any system in which it has been cooped up. With regard to the diversities of views and doctrines which have led to these remarks, I rejoice to see them. I am glad to see the co-operative erecting his parallelograms, and the phrenologist mapping out the skull. I cannot comprehend that delicate sensitiveness which is alarmed at novel and extraordinary opinions, as if the structure of society would be demolished, and the globe itself shattered by their promulgation.

B. How then are we to deal with doctrines which appear to be dangerous? Are we to stand idle and allow them free course?

N. Examine them: look them in the face: if they are false, they will vanish before the gaze of scrutiny: if they are true, I dare any man to say that they ought to vanish.

B. Your reply is what I expected, but I have another question to ask in which you may find more difficulty. Truth is one, error is pernicious; how then can you rejoice in the existence of diversities by which the uniformity of truth is excluded?

N. When I say I rejoice, I speak of course in reference, not to what is absolutely good, but to our actual state. The world is full of ignorance and error, and I am glad to see a zealous pursuit of even singular and eccentric views, as the means of ultimately lessening the evil. Tentative processes of this kind are indeed indispensable steps. The grand experiment which Mr. Owen is making in America, even if it miscarry, is sure to throw light on the principles of human nature.* Even the modern phrenology, should it prove utterly unfounded, will be of use. The prosecution of its inquiries will furnish a body of curious facts to the philosophical speculator; and if ultimately exploded, it will be to the philosophy of mind what alchemy was to chemistry, and astrology to the true science of the heavens.† The same benefit I

* Mr. Owen's scheme has failed, and *has* thrown light on the principles of human nature.

† 'Without the attractive chimeras of astrology, without the energetic delusions of alchemy, whence (asks M. Comte) should we have derived the constancy and ardor necessary for the long series of observations and experiments which have served in after times for a foundation to the first positive theories respecting both classes of phenomena?' With regard to phrenology, it has certainly made way amongst men of science, and besides other testimonies to the validity of its fundamental principles from high quarters, has the voice of the eminent philosopher just named in its favor. It may be added, that the curious phrenological phenomena (real or illusory) which everybody has of late years had an opportunity of witnessing, demand the impartial and rigorous scrutiny of all lovers of truth. It has been lamented as a misfortune in these cases, that

own does not spring from a diversity of religious sects, because theology is considered as a matter not open to progressive improvement. Each sect has its fixed doctrines, and the object is not to discover new truths, but to prevent any lapse from the principles prescribed. All inquiry with them is after new arguments to support old opinions. Yet here, although intellectual enterprise is discountenanced, contention and collision are brought into play; the contention of rival sects and the collision of hostile opinions, forcing an examination of points which men would fain shield from inquiry, extorting concessions which can no longer be decently withheld; and thus producing some of the good effects of that spirit of research and discovery which in less important sciences meets with such lavish encouragement. Although each sect may consider its own system as perfect, it has charity enough to assist in stripping other systems of their errors.

B. Then you regard all these diversities of thinking with great complacency?

N. They are really exhilarating in an enlarged view of the subject. At any given point of the progress, in any given state of knowledge or of ignorance, it is much better that the ignorance and the error should be of a

*interesting investigations are taken up by incompetent hands and almost abandoned to them, partly in consequence of a sort of daintiness, or a fear on the part of scientific inquirers of compromising their reputation, and partly from that force of prejudice from which few human beings are exempt. Yet to look at the matter more comprehensively, such incompetent handling is perhaps no misfortune at all. Subjects are in this way forced into discussion when they would otherwise remain neglected for long periods, awaiting the thaw of philosophic pride or prejudice; valuable materials are accumulated, and the fastidious or scornful philosopher is at length compelled to attend to the investigation in self-defence.

multiform than a uniform character. With my views, therefore, it is somewhat ludicrous to see the anger, the vexation, the resentment, with which the generality of men regard those who differ from them in opinion. Such difference seems to be felt as a sort of personal offence, as an intolerable grievance which must be repressed. Wounded self-love looks around it, and can find nothing short of an act of parliament or a judicial sentence adequate to the task of avenging its wrongs. What is the simple light, however, in which philosophy and common sense would see these differences? They would see, first, that the subject in question required examination; and, secondly, that it was likely to obtain the examination which it required. The permanent existence of any differences of opinion on any subject shows of itself, either that truth has not been fully attained by any of the dissentient parties, or that it has not been deduced in the most perspicuous method; and, therefore, that there is still a necessity for animadversion and discussion.

B. It is implied then in your view of the subject, that truth in these matters is attainable; that there are certain determinate principles which may be discovered, and from which indisputable deductions might be made.

N. Certainly. I see no reason to doubt it, and our friend A, who is so sanguine as to the progress of knowledge, must inevitably accord with me.

A. True: but others may ask how are such principles to be ascertained?

N. By a very slow but a tolerably sure process; by generation after generation thinking, and speaking, and writing; by proposing doubts and hypotheses; by criticism, by argument, by ridicule; by all the play and contention of wit and folly, scepticism and pertinacity, sophistry and good sense. From these discordant ele-

ments let loose on every possible subject of inquiry, we may ultimately expect that enlightened and lasting unanimity which always attends the clear and simple exhibition of truth.

B. But still you will allow, that there are some subjects which will probably ever remain dubious, difficult, and obscure; and which, as long as the world lasts, must inevitably engender differences of opinion.

N. I will not undertake to say that there is no subject which is doomed to be encumbered with eternal difficulties; but this I will venture to affirm, that of whatever kind they are, they will be accurately estimated and set in their proper light. The nature and the degree of the evidence on each point will be appreciated; the valid inferences, few or many, which the subject affords, will be clearly shown; the absurd conclusions previously drawn from it will be exploded; what it will and what it will not furnish will be rendered equally manifest; and although the obstacles to a perfect comprehension of it may never be surmounted, there may be complete unanimity as to the character of the difficulties which it presents. No reason can be assigned why all this should not be accomplished, however slowly and gradually it may be done, and this is in fact for us, for human beings, the attainment of truth.

B. Although I am not, for my own part, very sanguine as to any great progress in the human race, I would not deny that there might be a considerable one amongst a few superior minds, who are to be found in every age, and who, forming an unbroken series, might carry on indefinitely the work of perfecting the sciences: but I much doubt the possibility of any corresponding, or rather any commensurate progress in the multitude. It is one thing for the sciences to go on improving, and another for

the mass of mankind to become progressively partakers of such improvements.

N. The progress will be slow; nor will I undertake to maintain that it will be altogether commensurate with the advances of those superior minds to whom you refer; but nothing I think can prevent it. The same principles of human nature which render a science progressive among learned and studious men, will make knowledge progressive in every class. There is a certain measure of intelligence, or rather there is a certain set of notions, which every one inevitably imbibes, even the lowest of society; a certain atmosphere of knowledge breathed in common by all; and these notions depend upon the state of knowledge amongst those whose particular business it is to apply themselves to its cultivation. Now the correctness or incorrectness of the notions thus imbibed, makes no difference in the ease with which they are acquired. The mind of a child receives with as little difficulty the enlightened opinions prevalent in the best English society as the ruder notions of the Hindoo or Hottentot. Unless, therefore, the communication between the high and the low, the learned and the unlearned, is cut off, the latter cannot help partaking of the progress of their superiors. But it requires no evidence to show, that the tendency of modern improvement, far from threatening to interrupt or embarrass this communication, is decidedly to render it easy and complete. In fact, the sources of intelligence are open to all ranks indiscriminately. External obstacles to the general spread of sound knowledge are fast giving way. It is in the nature of the human mind itself, that we shall detect the most formidable impediment. We shall find it generally true, that discoveries are both slowly made, and slowly received and adopted. After a man has arrived at maturity, trained

in certain fixed principles, prejudices, and habits, it is impossible to change them essentially; and, even if his opinions could be changed, his associations and feelings would prove rebels to his intellect. Hence, as I have before observed, it is the young on whom any improvement is to be impressed; and hence it is an age at least which must be granted for its perfect establishment. Thus the wisdom of the pre-eminent few of one generation cannot become the common property, the familiar instrument of the crowd, till the next or a still later age; and it appears to me, that this process is one which comparatively little can be done to hasten, but which much may be done to perfect and extend.

A. Here again we come to our old point of disagreement. After all you have urged, I see no reason for departing from the opinion which I before maintained, that the wider and wider diffusion of knowledge amongst mankind must inevitably accelerate the progress of the race. The scope of your doctrine, which appears to me to involve a striking inconsistency, is to show, that a greater number of mankind may be made to partake of the progress, but that the rate of the progress cannot be quickened. You maintain in effect, that the general dissemination of knowledge has little or no tendency to render mankind readier to part with their prejudices; that what each man learns in his youth he must retain with a pertinacity equal and unalterable; and that even the most enlightened individual of the present day, after he has reached a certain age, is as callous to further improvement, as firmly indurated in his notions, as inaccessible to new ideas, as the rude barbarian of the American wild, or the benighted chieftain of the middle ages: or if you do not go quite so far as this; if you would reject this application of the doctrine to the philosopher, you must

at least maintain that the nature of the opinions which an ordinary man imbibes in that atmosphere of intelligence described by you as surrounding his infancy, can make no difference as to the tenacity with which they subsequently cling to him. In all this there appears to me to be an inconsistency for which I can account only by supposing, that it has been concealed from your view by a strong prejudice as to the slow progress of the race, resulting from a disappointment of your sanguine visions on this subject in early life. What! supposing a man's mind to be imbued in youth with liberal and enlightened sentiments, supposing him to gather without any direct effort on his own part, but from the actions and conversation of those around him, 'that the human mind is necessarily fallible, that therefore it should never close itself against new light, that it should be constantly accessible to fresh ideas, and ever on the watch to correct its errors; that truth and not its own importance should be its sacred object in all inquiries and on all subjects,'—supposing a man, I say, to be imbued with these views, are we to conclude that notwithstanding their influence he would be as inveterate, as stubborn in his prejudices, as unsusceptible of melioration as the most benighted of his species; as the deluded victim, for example, who casts himself under the chariot wheels of an idol, the superstitious devotee who heroically lashes himself as he conceives into the favor of God, or the furious bigot who exterminates heresy by the rack and the scaffold?

When the matter is put in this light, I think you must allow, that in proportion to the real intelligence of men will be their openness to conviction, their disposition to receive new ideas, their readiness to review their cherished opinions; and that a step of improvement may come in time to require something less than an age.

B. But you have forgotten another part of our friend's remark, in which I am fully disposed to join him, the necessary slowness with which the human mind makes any improvements, any inventions or discoveries.

A. To this part of his remarks an equally conclusive answer may be given. A great part of the slowness with which discoveries have succeeded each other, may be ascribed to the tardy and limited diffusion of knowledge. N. himself has made the remark, that one discovery must spring from another; that a man of inventive genius must rise from the height to which the labors of his predecessor have carried him. Now for a series of improvements and discoveries of this kind, I see no necessity for the intervention of long periods of time. If a man of original talent has the power of rising from the discoveries of his predecessor, he may do it, or begin to do it, from the moment they are known to him; and thus one man taking up the achievements of another, there may be a series of them even amongst contemporaneous inquirers. The only requisite condition seems to be a ready and immediate promulgation of all that is accomplished. Formerly indeed what any one man discovered made its way slowly and laboriously to others engaged in the same pursuit. Perhaps he would pass from the scene before his labors were understood and appreciated, and in such a state of imperfect inter-communication a barren interval must undoubtedly elapse between almost every successive discovery in the same science. This lapse of time, however, was required solely to propagate the intelligence amongst those who were likely to make use of it. At present, when the diffusion may be effected with the instantaneousness of lightning, when the world has become an immense whispering gallery, and the faintest accent of science is heard throughout every civilized country as soon as utter-

ed, the requisite conditions are changed. Long intervals are no longer necessary, and the career of improvement may be indefinitely accelerated. Besides, not only are discoveries more rapidly communicated to discovering minds, and the intervals of the series reduced almost to nothing, but with the general diffusion of knowledge, more of these original intellects start forth, and thus another cause is brought into operation to swell the train and hasten the triumph of science.

N. Your observations are ingenious, and to a certain extent perfectly just, nor do I know that they are at all inconsistent with my own views, except inasmuch as they lead to expectations of too sanguine a character. The process of improvement, and the circumstances which tend to accelerate what has been significantly and sometimes sneeringly termed the march of mind, you have accurately described. The only real difference between us is as to the rapidity of the progress; and I still think, that if you were to examine the condition of society with a severe scrutiny, if you were to make yourself practically acquainted with the intellectual state of the mass, if you were to see, as I have seen, that the glare of modern civilization is owing to the superficial illumination which the intelligence of a comparatively few has cast over the many, — in thus perceiving how little had actually been done, you would be inclined to grant more time for the evolution of those great and glorious results, which we unite in hailing as the ultimate destiny of the human race.

APPENDIX

OF

NOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS.

APPENDIX.

NOTE A. Page 202.

ALTHOUGH the following account referred to in the text may appear at first sight to have little connection with the subject of the present volume, yet, on reflection, it will be found to illustrate the great change in feeling which is consequent on the progress of knowledge and civilization, especially as to the value of human life.

'On the 26th of January, 1796, when the Indefatigable was lying in Hamoaze, after having been docked, the Dutton, a large East Indiaman employed in the transport service, on her way to the West Indies, with a part of the 2d or Queen's regiment, was driven into Plymouth by stress of weather. She had been out seven weeks, and had many sick on board. The gale increasing in the afternoon, it was determined to run for greater safety to Catwater; but the buoy at the extremity of the reef off Mount Batten having broke adrift, of which the pilots were not aware, she touched on the shoal, and carried away her rudder. Thus rendered unmanageable, she fell off and grounded under the citadel, where, beating round, she lay rolling heavily with her broadside to the waves. At the second roll she threw all her masts overboard together.

'Sir Edward and Lady Pellew were engaged to dine on that day with Dr. Harker, the excellent vicar of Charles, who had become acquainted with Mr. Pellew when they were serving together at Plymouth as surgeons to the marines, and continued through life the intimate and valued friend of all the brothers. Sir Edward noticed the crowds running to the Hoe, and having learned the cause, he sprang out of the carriage, and ran off with the rest. Arrived at the beach, he saw at once that the loss of nearly all on board, between five and six hundred, was inevitable, without some one to

direct them. The principal officers of the ship had abandoned their charge and got on shore, just as he arrived on the beach. Having urged them, but without success, to return to their duty, and vainly offered rewards to pilots and others belonging to the port to board the wreck, for all thought it too hazardous to be attempted, he exclaimed, "Then I will go myself!"

'A single rope, by which the officers and a few others had landed, formed the only communication with the ship; and by this he was hauled on board through the surf. The danger was greatly increased by the wreck of the masts, which had fallen towards the shore; and he received an injury on the back, which confined him to his bed for a week, in consequence of being dragged under the mainmast. But disregarding this at the time, he reached the deck, declared himself, and assumed the command. He assured the people that every one would be saved, if they quietly obeyed his orders; that he would himself be the last to quit the wreck, but that he would run any one through that disobeyed him. His well-known name, with the calmness and energy he displayed, gave confidence to the despairing multitude. He was received with three hearty cheers, which were echoed by the multitude on shore; and his promptitude and resource soon enabled him to find and apply the means by which all might be safely landed. His officers in the meantime, though not knowing that he was on board, were exerting themselves to bring assistance from the Indefatigable. Mr. Pellew, first lieutenant, left the ship in the barge, and Mr. Thompson, acting master, in the launch; but the boats could not be brought alongside the wreck, and were obliged to run for the Barbican. A small boat, belonging to a merchant-vessel, was more fortunate. Mr. Edsell, signal midshipman to the port admiral, and Mr. Coghlan, mate of the vessel, succeeded, at the risk of their lives, in bringing her alongside. The ends of two additional hawsers were got on shore, and Sir Edward contrived cradles to be slung upon them, with travelling ropes to pass forward and backward between the ship and the beach. Each hawser was held on shore by a number of men, who watched the rolling of the wreck, and kept the ropes tight and steady. Meantime a cutter had with great difficulty worked out of Plymouth pool, and two large boats arrived from the dock-yard, under the directions of Mr. Hemmings, the master-attendant, by whose caution and judgment they were enabled to approach the wreck, and receive the more helpless of the passengers, who were carried to the cutter. Sir Edward, with

his sword drawn, directed the proceedings, and preserved order, — a task the more difficult, as the soldiers had got at the spirits before he came on board, and many were drunk. The children, the women, and the sick, were the first landed. One of them was only three weeks old; and nothing in the whole transaction impressed Sir Edward more strongly than the struggle of the mother's feelings before she would entrust her infant to his care, or afforded him more pleasure than the success of his attempt to save it. Next the soldiers were got on shore; then the ship's company; and, finally, Sir Edward himself, who was one of the last to leave her. Every one was saved, and, presently after, the wreck went to pieces.'

After noticing the modesty of Sir Edward in his account of the affair in which he almost kept himself out of sight, his biographer proceeds: 'Service performed in the sight of thousands could not thus be concealed. Praise was lavished upon him from every quarter. The corporation of Plymouth voted him the freedom of the town. The merchants of Liverpool presented him with a valuable service of plate. On the 5th of March following he was created a baronet.' — *Life of Admiral Viscount Exmouth*, by E. Osler, p. 115, &c.

Note B. Page 308.

The only passage of any length in the first edition of the 'Essay on the Pursuit of Truth,' that has not been incorporated one way or other in this second and enlarged edition, occurred in this part of the treatise. The author not being able to find an appropriate place for it without encumbering the train of argument, has deemed it best to relegate it to the Appendix.

After speaking of the upright man who is unfortunate enough to be the unconscious instrument of disseminating error, the passage proceeds as follows: —

'To such a misfortune all men are liable, and this liability imposes on them the duty of communicating their opinions in a spirit of candor and liberality. In danger, with the utmost circumspection, of falling into mistakes, it becomes them to evince an entire openness to correction, a willingness to listen to opposite suggestions, a readiness to review their most cautious conclusions, and a perpetual sense of their own fallibility. They should endeavor, too, to separate the consideration of their own reputation from the cause of truth.

'A man who communicates his views to the world is or ought to

be an inquirer after truth; and it is of little importance to him in that capacity, when a mistake has been committed and detected, which part of the process is his. That an error has been cleared up, that a truth has been discovered, should occasion too much pleasure to his mind to permit it to dwell long on the personal consideration of the agency through which it has been accomplished.

'This openness to conviction, nevertheless, is perfectly consistent with a severe examination of all opposite allegations, and a free exposure of antagonist sophistry. Let him reply, retort, return the scrutiny of his opponents, and especially expose any unfairness or malevolence which may characterize their opposition; but let him at the same time cheerfully acknowledge any error of which he may be convicted; let him pay the most scrutinizing attention to hostile criticism, not to find out merely how to reply to it, but how far it is fairly applicable.

'Were we to imagine a being, who while he was free from the moral weaknesses of human nature, was still subject to its intellectual fallibility, the following is the kind of language we should expect to hear from him, on his giving to the public the result of any investigations in which he had been employed.

'In communicating these speculations to the world, I do it under a full sense of my liability to error, and of the chances that I have fallen into many mistakes, notwithstanding the patient thought which I have bestowed on the subject, and the various means I have employed to insure correctness. Future philosophers, I am aware, will see in a much clearer light the truths here developed, and will present them in a much more lucid and convincing order; divested too of the inaccuracies which surround them in my pages. These inaccuracies I have not the slightest wish to see spared. So far from desiring any one to forbear pointing out errors in my reasoning, I shall feel greatly indebted to him for the correction of a fallacy. One of the ends which I seek to accomplish by laying these speculations before the public, is to avail myself of the instruction arising out of the different views which different minds take of the same subject. And not only will any one confer a real benefit on me by dissipating my errors, but he will prevent my speculations from spreading erroneous opinions among mankind, and counteracting any advantages which might result from such of them as are well founded. Nothing can be more abhorrent to the feelings of a man of upright mind, than that errors should be perpetuated merely to preserve his repu-

tation for correctness, and save his vanity from mortification; nothing, therefore, ought to be received with more gratitude than an indication where those errors lie. It at once enlightens his own mind, and saves him from being the instrument of injury to his fellow-creatures, when he thought of doing them a service.

'On this point I have only one request to make, that the existence of an error may be *shown*, not merely *asserted;* and that any fallacy in reasoning may be *directly* pointed out, rather than met by counter-arguments drawn from different premises. When any train of reasoning is fairly laid down before us, if it involves an error the fallacy may be detected and exposed. For any such detection then I shall be grateful. I am willing to review, to discuss, to analyze again any principle which I have maintained, and should rejoice to emancipate myself from any illusion.

'Should any one intermix his exposure of my errors with opprobrious language, it will be to his own detriment and disgrace; but it shall not prevent me from taking advantage of his perspicacity to clear my understanding from inaccurate conceptions. While I shall do my best to seize the truth of his arguments, I shall also in the same spirit of fairness endeavor to appreciate and exhibit in its true colors that unfortunate junction of malignancy of disposition with intellectual power of which he has afforded the melancholy spectacle.

'If on the other hand the objections brought against any of my doctrines appear to me, after the fullest and fairest examination, to be unsound, I shall not hesitate on my part to expose their character. To this task I shall devote the utmost acuteness of which I am master, and undertake as close and severe an examination of their pretensions as I should desire might be bestowed on my own.

'In a word, as truth is my object, I shall endeavor to find it by every means in my power, and shall freely join in the exposure of error, whether found in preceding writings, in my own productions, or in those of my antagonists.'

Note C. Page 344.

The author has been desirous of treating this question respecting prescriptive conclusions, in its broadest application to knowledge of all kinds, and not merely in reference to politics or to theology. In the latter point of view, the subject has been discussed by one of the subtilest intellects of the eighteenth century, in a short essay from which Mrs. Austin's recent translation of 'Fragments from German

Writers,' enables me to present to the English reader an interesting extract.

'But is not an association of clergymen, — a church assembly or a venerable *classis* as they call themselves in Holland, — justified in binding itself by oath to certain immutable articles of faith, in order to exercise a perpetual supreme guardianship over each of its members, and indirectly through them over the people? I answer such a thing is totally inadmissible. A compact of this kind, which is entered into with a view to exclude the human race from all further enlightenment, is simply null and void, even though it be confirmed by the sovereign power, by diets, and the most solemn treaties. One age cannot bind itself; nor can it conspire to place the following one in a condition in which it would be impossible for it to extend its knowledge, to purge itself from error, and to advance in the career of enlightenment. This were a crime against human nature, whose highest destination consists emphatically in intellectual progress; and posterity is, therefore, fully justified in rejecting all such attempts to bind it, as invalid and mischievous.

'A combination to maintain an unalterable religious system, which no man should be permitted to call into doubt, would, even for the term of one man's life, be wholly intolerable. It would be to blot out, as it were, one generation in the progress of the human species towards a better condition; to render it barren, and hence noxious to posterity. A man can, indeed, retard his own intellectual progress, though even then only for a time, as regards things which it is incumbent on him to know; but utterly to renounce it for himself, and far more for posterity, is an outrage on the most sacred rights of humanity. Now, what a people ought not to determine for itself, a monarch ought still less to determine for it; for his legislative character and dignity rests on his being the depository and organ of the collective will of his people. If he does but ascertain that every real or supposed spiritual improvement consists with the existing order and tranquillity of society, he may safely leave his subjects to do what they think necessary for the good of their own souls: in that he has no right to interfere; his business is to take care that none of them forcibly obstruct their neighbors in their endeavors to settle their own opinions, or to promote their own spiritual welfare by any means within their reach.'

. . . . . .

'In considering the enlightenment by which men emerge from

their self-imposed pupilage, I have insisted mainly on religion; because in science and art rulers have no interest in assuming the part of guardians over their subjects; and because pupilage in this matter is not only the most mischievous, but the most degrading of any. But the views of an enlightened ruler go still farther, and tend to this, — that, even as regards his government, there is no danger in allowing his subjects to make a *public* use of their own reason, and frankly to lay before the world their opinions as to any practicable improvement in it, or their criticisms of its present state and acts; of this we have before us a splendid and hitherto unequalled example.' — Essay by Kant, entitled, 'What is Enlightenment?' in his *Kleine Schriften*.

Note D. Pages 344, 345.

The very important consideration, briefly stated at the conclusion of this Section, will be found more fully expanded in the following extract from a work referred to in a previous chapter. Every upright and conscientious mind must agree in regarding the question started, or rather the position taken, as demanding the most attentive and dispassionate scrutiny, apart from any particular application. The passage may possibly remind the reader (sometimes in the way of contrast) of certain portions of Bishop Hare's celebrated Letter on Private Judgment,* or of Dr. Paley's Chapter on Religious Establishments and Toleration; but I am not aware that the peculiar view of the subject here presented, taken as a whole, is to be found in English literature: —

'The course of my subject has brought me to the consideration of the third sort of practices enumerated in a former letter. The real character of these has been hitherto little regarded, but can scarcely be mistaken by any one who reflects for a moment on the necessary consequences of annexing emoluments and honors to the profession of a given doctrine, or, in other words, to the ostensible adoption of a predetermined conclusion.

'By this time I hope you will so far agree with my views as to admit that the duty of every inquirer into the authenticity and meaning of any alleged revelation from God, is nothing more or less than complete and impartial investigation; and hence if any reward

* The Difficulties and Discouragements which attend the Study of the Scriptures in the Way of Private Judgment, in a Letter to a Young Clergyman. By Francis Hare, D.D.

but that which springs from the discharge of a duty and from the attainment of knowledge, is to be held up to his view, it assuredly ought to be contingent on the proper prosecution of the inquiry, whatever may be the issue. If he is to be artificially incited at all, he should be incited to perform the part of a diligent and honest inquirer. But no one can gravely maintain that to annex the reward to a prescribed result, to a predetermined verdict, is the way to encourage or secure fairness and sufficiency of examination: on the contrary, you and every body else must admit that it is nothing less than bribing the inquirer into negligence and unfairness: it is setting up his worldly interest in opposition to his duty to God. No conclusion can be more palpable than this. Those who deny it must maintain either that a complete and faithful examination of any alleged message from the Deity is not the duty of human beings, or that exhibiting certain advantages to accrue from arriving at a prescribed conclusion has no tendency to impair diligence and impartiality during the process of inquiry. The one position is at variance with all our moral sentiments; the other with all our experience of mankind. There can be no doubt, my dear Hassan, that the consequences of the doctrine here maintained are irreconcilable with some current notions and existing establishments; but what can be more clearly deducible from the undeniable truth that our own duty to God requires from us a complete and unbiassed examination of any alleged message from him, than the kindred truth that it must be wrong in us to present inducements to any other human being which have the tendency to render his examination of the same solemn subject incomplete and partial? And what inducement can operate more effectually to render his inquiry slight and negligent and unfair, and thus to seduce him from the direct path of duty, than holding out emoluments and honors as the consequence of deciding on one side rather than the other? The immorality of this proceeding, and its consequences upon the conduct of the inquirer, are equally incontestable.

'Figure to yourself, my friend, a young man, who, while he is desirous to discharge every duty, and ardent in the pursuit of truth, is at the same time ambitious of power, wealth, and distinction. A career is open to him, in which these latter desires may be gratified on the single condition of professing and teaching certain established tenets, and performing certain offices grounded upon them. Is it to be supposed that before he accepts the tempting offer, his candor

and conscientiousness will be sufficiently strong to induce him to institute a fair and rigid examination of tenets on which his wealth and station are to depend? and after he has accepted it, will the inducements to the performance of that duty be strengthened or increased? The result is not very doubtful; he shuns inquiry and accepts the office, and from that moment all probability of any fair investigation is at an end: he becomes an intellectual slave bound in golden fetters: he is no more free to pursue truth, than the chained eagle is free to soar into the sky; or, rather, he is quite as free to pursue it as the muezzin to throw himself from the minaret, or as the traveller to leap from the summit of the great pyramid; that is to say, at the risk of consequences — of utter destruction.

'And is it possible not to perceive that, besides putting an end to impartial examination, this species of bribery is a bounty on hypocritical pretension? Is there one man in ten thousand, who, looking forward to the prospect of living in the enjoyment of worldly advantages from the profession of certain opinions, will shrink from that profession in the first instance, or subsequently abandon it, because he finds it impossible to believe in the opinions professed? Can there be a more effectual method of creating insincerity, as well as indifference to truth, and can there be a practice more destructive of moral worth and real piety?

. . . . . .

'I cannot close without repeating, that independently of engendering hypocrisy and persecution, and putting a stop to the progress of truth, to bestow rewards on theological opinions, — to make the profession of them the condition of honors and emoluments, — is at variance with the highest principles of religious and moral obligation. If it is our personal duty to the Almighty to examine with full attention and rigorous impartiality any revelation attributed to him, it is an offence against both God and man to tempt others by the offer of any advantages to deviate from the same course.' — *Letters of an Egyptian Kafir in search of a Religion* (printed by G. H. Davidson), pp. 109, *et seq.*

The extract given in the next Note from De Tocqueville, shows very strikingly that such temptations are not limited to theological opinions, nor are held out only by state authority.

Note E. Page 346.

'In America, the majority raises very formidable barriers to the liberty of opinion: within these barriers an author may write whatever he pleases, but he will repent it, if he ever step beyond them.* Not that he is exposed to the terrors of an auto-da-fé, but he is tormented by the slights and persecutions of daily obloquy. His political career is closed forever, since he has offended the only authority which is able to promote his success. Every sort of compensation, even that of celebrity, is refused to him. Before he published his opinions, he imagined that he held them in common with many others; but no sooner has he declared them openly, than he is loudly censured by his overbearing opponents, whilst those who think, but have not the courage to speak, like him, abandon him in silence. He yields at length, oppressed by the daily efforts he has been making, and he subsides into silence, as if he were tormented by remorse for having spoken the truth.

'Fetters and headsmen were the coarse instruments which tyranny formerly employed; but the civilization of our age has refined the arts of despotism, which seemed, however, to have been sufficiently perfected before. The excesses of monarchical power has devised a variety of physical means of oppression; the democratic republics of the present day have rendered it as entirely an affair of the mind, as that will which it is intended to coerce. Under the absolute sway of an individual despot, the body was attacked in order to subdue the soul; and the soul escaped the blows which were directed against it, and rose superior to the attempt; but such is not the course adopted by tyranny in democratic republics: there the body is left free and the soul is enslaved. The sovereign can no longer say, "You shall think as I do on pain of death;" but he says, "You are free to think differently from me, and to retain your life, your property, and all that you possess; but if such be your determination, you are henceforth an alien amongst your people. You may retain your civil rights, but they will be useless to you, for you will never be chosen by your fellow-citizens if you solicit their suffrages; and they will affect to scorn you, if you solicit their esteem. You will remain among men, but you will be deprived of the rights of mankind.

* It was sagaciously remarked by Kant, that 'we find a strange and unexpected contradiction in human affairs, which, indeed, when regarded as a whole, are full of paradoxes. A higher degree of civil freedom would appear favorable to freedom of opinion, yet does, in fact, impose insuperable barriers to it.'

Your fellow-creatures will shun you like an impure being; and those who are most persuaded of your innocence will abandon you too, lest they should be shunned in their turn. Go in peace! I have given you your life, but it is an existence incomparably worse than death."

'Monarchical institutions have thrown an odium upon despotism; let us beware lest democratic republics should restore oppression, and should render it less odious and less degrading in the eyes of the many, by making it still more onerous to the few.' — *Democracy in America*, by A. de Tocqueville, Reeve's translation, vol. ii. p. 160.

The sort of social proscription here described is much more prevalent in England, particularly in provincial society, than philosophers seem to be generally aware of, and is dependent on causes not peculiar to republics. M. de Tocqueville's representation of the treatment of opinions in America is, however, too favorable. It is not, as he states, there rendered 'entirely an affair of the mind.' We do not witness, indeed, a priestly auto-da-fé in the streets of Boston, or a headsman in Cincinnati, but we see 'physical means of oppression' equally horrible. Not many years ago the governor of South Carolina recommended the summary execution, without benefit of clergy, of all persons caught within the limits of the State holding avowed anti-slavery opinions; and this savage recommendation was backed by a *select committee* of the legislature.* Further, this atrocious spirit has not contented itself with mere recommendations; houses have been sacked and destroyed, public buildings burnt to the ground, human beings seized, flogged, and murdered with the express object of punishing and putting down the holders of such opinions. Amos Dresser, a student, was arrested, tried before a self-constituted tribunal at Nashville, Tennessee, found guilty of being a member of an Anti-slavery Society in another State, of having books of an anti-slavery tendency in his possession, and of being *believed* to have circulated such in his travels. For these offences (incredible as it may appear), in the year 1835 (not 1535), in an 'enlightened republic,' he was stripped and flogged with a heavy cow-hide in the public market-place amidst the acclamations of the people! But the most affecting instance of martyrdom for opinions in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, is the case of a young man named Lovejoy — an abolitionist, a clergyman, and editor of a newspaper. Four times his types and press were destroyed by mobs, and still he

* Society in America, by Harriet Martineau, vol. ii. p. 350.

persevered in the resolution of maintaining his ground at all hazards. Being required by a committee of the citizens of Alton, in the state of Illinois, where he had taken up his residence, to leave the place, he addressed a large assembly before which he was summoned,

'Pale, but intrepid; sad, but unsubdued,'

in an unpremeditated speech, which, for courage, justness of thought, pathos, modest but immovable firmness, — in a word, moral sublimity, has seldom been equalled. Such qualities among such a people sealed his doom. A few days afterwards, his office was surrounded by a mob, and he was murdered on his own premises, having received five bullets in his body.* Further comment would be superfluous.

Note F. Page 362.

There is just now an instructive instance going on in the medical profession, and amongst scientific men generally, of the reception given to new doctrines. I allude to what is usually termed Mesmerism. Without entering upon the question respecting its claims to credence, which this is not the place to discuss, it is very obvious to all who are conversant with the subject, that whatever those claims may be, there is a singularly curious field for inquiry which cannot fail to produce interesting and important results; and from which no philosopher who, in the phrase of the day, understands his mission, will turn away. Either the great mass of alleged facts in Mesmerism are true; or the power of imposture, and the susceptibility of being imposed upon possessed by mankind, transcend any thing previously apprehended. If the latter is the conclusion to which philosophers shall be ultimately driven, the laws of this power and of this susceptibility of deception, will form almost as curious a matter for investigation, as the Mesmeric phenomena would themselves do on the supposition they were real.† On either issue, therefore, the whole subject is extremely worthy of attention to the highest intel-

* See a deeply interesting article in the Westminster Review, No. LXII., entitled 'The Martyr Age of the United States.'

† 'Are not,' asks Dugald Stewart, 'the mischievous consequences which have actually been occasioned by the pretenders to animal magnetism, the strongest of all encouragements to attempt such an examination of the principles upon which the effects really depend, as may give to scientific practitioners the management of agents so peculiarly efficacious and overbearing.'— *Elements*, vol. iii. p. 222.

lects; and yet ordinary men have turned from it with angry scorn, refusing even to cast their eyes on the appearances before them, reminding one of the conduct of those candid lovers of truth, who after the invention of the telescope, refused to look through it because it would have clearly shown them their own errors. But the object of this note is not to stimulate the reader to an investigation of Mesmerism, or inspire him with any sentiments in its favor, but to direct his attention to what more immediately concerns our subject, namely, *the mode of its reception;* to incite him to seize the present opportunity of watching the way in which men are instigated by their prejudices, preconceptions, and personal interests, to conduct themselves towards new doctrines.

It has been remarked by an eminent philosopher, that we cannot now find any language in the process of formation as described by theorists, unfolding itself in inflexions and terminations; but in the instance before us we are more fortunate. Nature may be truly said to be caught in the fact; we may watch the whole development from first to last of the reception given to the announcement of new phenomena and novel inferences. We may study it in all its stages from birth to death, and on a scale on which we shall never have an opportunity, perhaps, of studying it again.

Note G. Page 365.

The theory of population still remains to be settled by a masterhand. Mr. Malthus had a candid and an accomplished mind, well calculated to bring out a theory in a striking and popular form, but too destitute of precision and depth to do justice to one of the most difficult subjects in the whole range of political economy. At the very outset he takes an enormous leap to a point which it is doubtful whether he could have gained by the legitimate and laborious process of digging his way, and making sure of every step.

Any one who wishes to study the subject, and therefore to look at both sides, will do well not to be repelled by the unwieldy volumes of Mr. Sadler, nor should he overlook the comparatively brief work of Mr. Doubleday.

With regard to Mr. Ricardo, who was a good deal over estimated in his day, the present writer published a free commentary on some of his doctrines in 1825 (when the fame of that eminent economist was at the highest), under the title of 'A Critical Dissertation on the Nature, Measures, and Causes of Value,' the main conclusions

of which, although the author was in some quarters much abused for them at the time, while equally lauded in others, subsequent research and reflection have tended to confirm; and he has observed many of them to have been since silently adopted by contemporary economists, sometimes to an extent that ought in mere justice to have been accompanied by an acknowledgment of the source from which they were drawn.* A very striking instance of this in a quarter where it was least to be looked for, the author forbears to mention.

Note H. Page 378.

The inevitable extension of the methods employed in physical science to moral and political investigation is now almost universally acknowledged; the following representation of it may be new to the reader: —

'While I highly appreciate the ultimate importance of clear and forcible exhibitions of moral truth, I am apt to indulge the hope of a surer and speedier effect from the progress of that physical philosophy to which I have adverted, especially since I have become better acquainted with its advances in this country. Compared with the English, we,† my friend, are in these matters mere children. In our part of the world, physical science being either visionary or empirical, or both united, could not be expected to have any effect in improving morals and politics by the superiority of its methods. But here it is pursued on rigorous principles, which must ultimately be applied to knowledge of every kind.

'The practices of rejecting mere gratuitous hypotheses, of demanding facts, of requiring every step of reasoning to be clearly exhibited, of looking for perfect precision in the use of terms, of discarding rhetorical illusions and mere phrases, of scouting pretensions to infallibility or exemption from rigorous scrutiny, are all prevalent here, all recognized as indispensable in physical research, and cannot possibly be confined to the department of material philosophy. They will necessarily be extended to moral inquiries; and

* This cannot be said of Mr. De Quincey, who in his recent work, 'The Logic of Political Economy,' has honored the 'Dissertation on Value' with divers comments. Whether these are just or not, the present writer having seen the volume only for a few moments while revising this sheet, is not in a condition to say; but he feels quite sure from Mr. De Quincey's abilities and attainments, that his logical views on any subject must be exceedingly valuable.

† Namely, the Egyptians or Moslems generally.

even supposing that, in consequence of social proscription, or priestly or political tyranny, these latter subjects were totally abandoned, received no direct examination, were exposed to no discussion for even a long period, were withheld (if we can conceive it possible) from the very thoughts of men for half a century, yet the influence of physical investigation upon them could not in the end be prevented. All the correct principles of reasoning, all the improved methods of research, all the habits of comparison and discrimination, all the love of truth which the pursuit of any science has a tendency to establish or engender, all the impatience of vagueness and obscurity and assumption which the prosecution of inquiry superinduces upon the spirits of men, would gather round the prohibited subjects, ready, like hungry lions, to rush on what they had been withheld from, by the bars and bolts and chains of social or political despotism.' *

Note I. Page 387.

This *being hooted* from society in consequence of professing particular opinions has really occurred in the United States of America since this was written. The following extract confines itself to *hooting* (at which, however, the people did not stop, as lamentably shown in a former note), and is probably one of the most forcible representations of what that term includes ever penned. Speaking of the friends of the abolition of slavery, the writer says: 'They met in smaller or larger numbers from time to time; they met for refreshment and for mutual strength: but it was in the intervals of these meetings, the weary, lonely intervals, that their trials befel them. It was when the husband was abroad about his daily business that he met with his crosses: his brother merchants deprived him of his trade; his servants insulted him; the magistrate refused him redress of grievances; among his letters he found one inclosing the ear of a negro; or a printed handbill offering large rewards for his own ears or his head; or a lithographed representation of himself hanging from a gallows or burning in a tar-barrel. It was when the wife was plying her needle by the fire-side, that messages were brought in from her tradesmen that they could supply her no longer, or that letters dropped in with such contents as the following: —

* Letters of an Egyptian Kafir, p. 134.

'"Madam,

'"I write to inform you that personal violence is intended on you and your husband this evening.

'"Yours in haste,

'"An Abolitionist.

'"Beware of nine o'clock.'"

'It was in the course of ordinary life that their children came crying from school tormented by their school-fellows for their parents' principles; that youths had the doors of colleges slammed in their faces, and that young men were turned back from the pulpit and the bar.'*

Note K. Page 389.

Extract from a letter dated London, March 1, 1785, from the Count de Mirabeau to Sir Samuel (then Mr.) Romilly:—

'"He was happy," said I, one day in speaking of Fontenelle. These words, which ought to find a joyful echo in every good breast, alas! one hardly ventures to utter them. Hatred and envy have ever made Fontenelle's happiness a cause of reproach to him. They made it a crime in him that he did not draw down upon himself persecution from the prejudices of his age; that he showed to others only half of those truths of which he saw the whole; that he drew aside one veil from the image of truth, only to throw over it another; that he exhibited genius trembling before prejudices which ought to have trembled before him. What a passion is Envy! without relaxation she pursues the man of genius, throwing back upon him all the torment which she suffers at his hands. If he utter a complaint, she says that he is lowering himself by retaliation; if he be silent, his silence is insensibility to insult; if his uncompromising spirit lead him to make popular error the object of his undisguised attack, she paints him as a factious spirit, with whom nothing is sacred; if his prudence soften truth, in order that it may not be exposed to the outrage of the multitude, she accuses him of having stifled it in its birth, and of having sacrificed the eternal rights of mankind to a few days of repose. Doubtless we must admire those vigorous and intrepid spirits who proclaim truth in all the splendor and dignity with which their own genius has clothed her; and who not satisfied with the glory of discovering her, aspire to that of suffering, and, if

* See the article before referred to, entitled 'The Martyr Age of the United States,' Westminster Review, No. LXII. p. 15.

need be, of dying for her. I shall always respect Fenelon writing *Telemachus* in the court of Louis XIV., and Sir Thomas More publishing the Utopia in the palace of Henry VIII. These noble spirits hallow the age which dishonored itself by persecuting them. But while one sheds tears of pity and admiration at the thought of such heroical self-devotion, one regrets that the human mind should not have benefited by them as it ought. I come, my friend, to the conclusion, that to sacrifice one's self for truth is not the way to insure its triumph. Persecution which spreads the progress of error, arrests that of reason; and philosophers do not, like fanatics, multiply in exile, in prison, and under the axe of the executioner. Perhaps there have been countries and ages in which the boldest truth, announced on a sudden to a sovereign people, forced upon the attention of an immense multitude by all the powers of eloquence, might have effected a revolution [in opinion] at the very moment of its utterance; and it were noble to sacrifice one's self to such a hope as this. But in our days time only can give to truth the victory over prejudice; with us the reign of truth is not the dazzling sway of some new creation of genius, but it is the imperceptible influence of general intelligence, by which error is overthrown without the sound of its fall being heard.

'This is the point of view, my dear Romilly, in which this Fontenelle, whom I have so long despised, only perhaps because of all men of genius he is the one to whom nature has made me the most unlike, appears to me to be so remarkable. Truth seems in his eyes to be like that ancient statue of Isis, which was covered with many veils; he thinks that every age should remove one veil, and only raise the next for the age which is to follow. He knows men and he fears them, not only because they are capable of doing much harm, but because it is very difficult to do them any good; and he has found the means of doing them good by the practice of an art which would doubtless never have been resorted to by a more energetic and impetuous character, but which in him has made even timidity and discretion subservient to the progress of the spirit of philosophy. At one time he bows down for a moment before an error of his own age, and then raising himself from this constrained attitude of respect, in its very presence, he aims a blow at a similar error which has deluded all antiquity. At another time he places by the side of error a truth which he appears to sacrifice and subject to her, but which is sure to be triumphant provided it be allowed to remain there even at

such a cost.* Often he parades prejudices in all their pretensions, and even grants them that which from the fear of appearing too absurd they do not claim. At those times when homage is expected from him he is silent, and this silence always occurs at a place where it will be best understood, and give least offence. Sometimes, on the other hand, he is eager to appear unnecessarily submissive and obsequious, and by so doing shows that there are unjust and suspicious tyrants whom one must distrust. In general, instead of attacking errors one by one, he devotes himself to the task of exposing and drying up in the human mind the sources whence they spring. He aims at giving new light and strength to that power of intelligence which is destined to subvert them all, and by so doing raises up against them an eternal enemy. Thus he attacks them by respect, destroys them by homage, pierces them on all sides with shafts of which they have no right to complain; and although they have always an eye upon him as upon their most dangerous enemy, he lives and dies in peace in the very midst of them.

'Without any disparagement to my own impetuosity, this method may very possibly, my dear friend, be the best, and no less entitled to respect than mine, and it is certainly far more conducive to personal tranquillity; but as it does not and never will suit my character, I begin to feel a great inclination for idleness, even that of mind, and above all a very lively regret for inroads on my time, occasioned by human observances, the fantastical opinions of other men, and the conventions of society.' †

* We are here reminded of a passage in Playfair. 'Error,' he says, 'is never so sure of being exposed as when the truth is placed close to it, side by side, without any thing to alarm prejudice, or awaken from its lethargy the dread of innovation.' — *Works*, vol. ii. p. 426.

† Memoirs of the Life of Sir Samuel Romilly, by his Sons, vol. i. p. 293. The translation above given is the same as that in the Memoirs, with a few verbal alterations.

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